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THE NEW TESTAMENT
IDEA OF REVELATION

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SPIRIT IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The New Testament Idea of Revelation

BY

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CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS
NEW YORK LONDON

MCMXXXV

BS3539
R454

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PREFACE

Everything else in the New Testament depends on the idea of revelation. The writers believe that God reveals himself, that he has made his final revelation in Christ, that they have been enabled by the Spirit to receive and impart the revelation. They nowhere define their idea of revelation, and perhaps did not consciously reflect on it; nevertheless it forms the basis of all their thinking. It would not be difficult to show that most of the misunderstanding of the New Testament has arisen from the failure to take due account of this primary idea. In the older theology it was confused with a mechanical doctrine of inspiration; in more recent enquiry it has been left out of sight altogether. The result in the one case is to detach the gospel from its historical setting, and in the other to interpret it wholly in terms of historical development. The mind of today is dissatisfied with both these methods of explaining the New Testament. Can we not enter a little more deeply into the inner motive of the book? Can we not recover something of the original idea of the Christian message as a revelation?

An attempt is made in the present work to find an answer to this question. Much has been written of late years on the subject of revelation, considered abstractly from a theological or philosophical point of view. The value of such discussion is undoubted; but the author has tried as far as possible to keep clear of all theories which

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might lead him to impose some arbitrary construction on New Testament thought. His aim has been to examine the New Testament itself, and discover from their actual teaching how its writers conceived of revelation. Apart from Jesus himself he has confined his explicit attention to Paul and John. What we learn of revelation from the other writings serves only to supplement, and occasionally to obscure, the main Christian idea as set forth by the two outstanding teachers.

E. F. SCOTT.

NEW YORK, N. Y.
January, 1935.

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THE NEW TESTAMENT
IDEA OF REVELATION

CHAPTER I

THE MEANING OF REVELATION

A DISTINCTION was commonly made, in the last century, between natural and revealed religion. Certain beliefs were found to be practically universal, and seemed to be inherent in the very constitution of man's mind. Others could be traced back to individual prophets, who laid claim to a unique and supernatural knowledge. The great historical religions were all, in this sense, revealed. They offered a teaching which might be confirmed by reason and experience but was divinely given, and must be accepted by an act of faith.

This distinction can no longer be maintained. It has grown apparent, for one thing, that in the so-called revealed religions there are many elements which are purely natural. Judaism, for example, rests on the conviction that the Mosaic law, down to its minutest details, was prescribed by God. Yet we are now aware that much of this legislation was adopted from the Babylonian codes, and that some of the most sacred ritual practices can be explained from primitive folk-lore. It cannot be reasonably doubted that behind the law there was a great prophet, Moses, who brought to the Hebrew people a new knowledge of God. But his message has been mingled with

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elements from earlier religions, and it is impossible to separate the revealed beliefs from the natural. Again, to classify certain religions as "natural" is only another way of saying that we are unable to trace their beginnings. Plants that grow wild are yet sprung from seed that has blown from somewhere; and behind even the crudest form of worship there is some forgotten prophet. The religion was not the spontaneous product of society at a given stage of culture. It embodies, in the last resort, a revelation, made to some particular man. Once more, the old distinction is misleading, on broader, philosophical grounds. All religion is by its very nature revealed; this is what makes it religion, as contrasted with ordinary knowledge. Man has always been conscious that the ordered system within which he lives is not everything. Over against it there is another order of reality, and the aim of religion is to make contact with this reality, which cannot be apprehended by sense or intellect. The animals never arrive at religion; neither do the philosophers and men of science. The facts of religion lie apart from the natural order, and can only be known through revelation.

It is necessary, at this point, to take note of a common misunderstanding which has brought endless confusion into the study of religion. In the earlier phases of culture there are no criteria by which the natural and the supernatural can be distinguished. Men are still confined within a narrow range of experience, and everything that lies beyond it is vaguely included within the realm of the unknowable. Any rare phenomenon—an eclipse or earthquake or thunder-storm—is set down to a supernatural

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agency. Operations of the mind which are in any way abnormal are ascribed to divine impulse. In all stages of progress the illusion in some degree persists, that whatever has not yet been explained must be inexplicable. Yet with the widening out of knowledge one mystery and another is brought within the compass of law; provinces which once belonged to the supernatural are gradually annexed to the domain of nature. It might thus appear as if the whole idea of revelation were at best a provisional one. A religious explanation holds good only so long as a rational one cannot be discovered, and a time will come at last when all that we now call revelation will be simply a part of ordinary knowledge. A view of this kind is widely prevalent at the present day. Religion is regarded as nothing but an immature stage of intellectual progress. So much that was formerly miraculous has now been accounted for that it seems impossible to set any limit to the advance of reason. The whole of religion will some day be absorbed into scientific law.

Now it may be granted that in past times the boundaries of the knowable were falsely drawn. To this day we have only a faint conception of the powers of the human mind, and of the vast regions which it is still destined to conquer. Yet this does not affect the essential idea of revelation. From the beginning man has felt himself to be a traveller, making his way by the light of a lantern through a great darkness. The light has proved stronger than he knew, and has illuminated an ever wider circle. He can distinguish countless objects which were once completely hidden. Yet it still remains true that he

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travels by a lantern through a vast surrounding darkness. His sense of the unknowable is not due to some passing limitation but to the 'intrinsic conditions of his life on earth. For that part, with each extension of the ring of light he becomes more conscious of the darkness. Religion, whatever it may be, cannot be explained as a primitive make-shift for knowledge, for it is knowledge which has fully awakened in us the sense of ignorance. Perhaps the prevailing attitude among men of science in our own day is that of agnosticism. Not so long ago there was an easy confidence that all secrets would presently be laid bare by the continued effort of man's thought. This effort has now advanced to a point that was hardly conceivable even a generation ago, and the result has not been final knowledge but the confession that we cannot know. The agnostic attitude is loosely confounded in the popular mind with a purely material outlook on the world, but properly understood it means just the opposite. It is the admission that beyond the material things which can be measured and explained, there is another sphere of reality. When knowledge has been pushed to its limit we find ourselves confronted with a closed door. The agnostic perceives the barrier, and holds that it can never be penetrated; and this attitude, if the fact of revelation be denied, is the only one now possible to reverent and thoughtful men.

It cannot, however, be permanently maintained. As an intelligent being man is endowed with boundless curiosity, and in spite of all prohibitions he must needs try to know. Besides this necessity laid on us by the very nature

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of the mind there is a practical necessity. That world which is hidden from us is not remote and negligible. If we cannot, with all our science, learn much about the fixed stars, we can fall back on the reflection that they are infinitely far away, and that nothing which happens in them can greatly concern us. It is otherwise with that world of unseen reality. We are conscious that although hidden from us it is intimately bound up with our own life. There is something within us which insists that we are made for God, that we are subject to God's law, that our action is meaningless unless we can relate it somehow to the divine purpose. Ever since he appeared on earth man has been asking himself the eternal questions, "what am I?" "whence have I come, and whither do I go?" "what is my duty and happiness?" These are the most urgent of all questions, and they cannot be answered without reference to that order of things which is beyond our knowledge. It was for this reason that the need for revelation made itself felt from the beginning. Before they endeavoured to understand this world, men were already seeking to discern something of that other world. They were demanding that, since they could not by their own effort discover God, he should reveal himself.

Revelation, then, implies the disclosure of a realm of truth which cannot be apprehended by sense, or by ordinary process of thought. From this it follows that the disclosure must be given. The word "revelation" is applied vaguely in our common language, to every discovery that

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widens our horizons. Columbus, Newton, Kant, Darwin—each of them, we say, brought a revelation. The Roman poet speaks with reverence of his philosophical master¹ who “pushed back the flaming ramparts of the world”; and those who have done so, in greater or less degree, we hail as revealers. But these extensions of knowledge, however marvellous, do not truly constitute revelation. They are achieved by human intellect. The facts they bring to our knowledge are only an addition to those which we know already. Microscope and telescope do not reveal; they simply enlarge the normal range of vision. In revelation, on the other hand, the truth disclosed is different in kind from that which we possess. It is not obtained through any exertion of our own thought. The mind waits passively for something which will be shown to it, and which may prove utterly different from anything it has conceived. There is indeed a preparation necessary, but it does not consist in assiduous learning or in training of the intellectual powers. It consists in nothing else than in willingness to accept what may be given from a power outside of us. “He that receiveth not the Kingdom as a little child shall in no wise enter into it.” These words express, for all time, the condition of mind apart from which there can be no revelation.

In the New Testament, therefore, a contrast is repeatedly drawn between “man’s wisdom” and the higher knowledge. Sometimes it is put in an exaggerated form, as if the intellect were a positive hindrance to the discernment of truth. This is certainly not the meaning intended.

¹ Lucretius, “*De Rerum Natura*,” I:73.

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Paul, who condemns the futility of "man's wisdom," had himself the greatest intellect of his time, and employs it fearlessly in the exposition of his message. His thought is simply that God makes his revelation to a wisdom which may exist along with the other but is different in kind and must not be confounded with it. A poet may also be a geologist or historian, and his work will be the richer because he has that background of special knowledge. It must not, however, thrust itself in his way when he seeks to interpret nature or the past. The poetical apprehension is one thing, and the scientific is quite another. So the knowledge of unseen realities is different from ordinary knowledge, and is dulled and distorted whenever it forgets the difference.

Much of the confusion in our modern religious thinking is due to nothing else than our vague use of the term "revelation." We take for granted that since all new knowledge is a revealing, every intellectual advance is also a religious one. Fresh light keeps pouring in upon us concerning the world we live in, the workings of the mind, the origin and progress of human society. We assume that in all these new discoveries God unfolds his mind to us, and that there is, in truth, no other revelation. This mode of thought has been fostered, in no small measure, by our traditional attitude to the Bible as the revealed word of God. Much of it, as we now realise, is nothing but primitive science or speculation. It offers a supernatural answer to all problems, for no other reason than that men were still ignorant of true causes and processes. One thinks, for instance, of the closing chapters of the book of Job, with

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their series of questions regarding the marvellous phenomena of nature—snow, rain, wind, the life of plants and animals, the motions of the stars. Most of these riddles, put forward, in magnificent poetry, as utterly beyond man's guessing, have now been answered—not by any supernatural voice but by patient thought and investigation. Will it not prove the same with all the other mysteries on which the Bible seeks to enlighten us? Nothing is ever revealed except through the increase of knowledge. But revelation is not to be confused with the progress of the mind towards new truth. It has to do with a sphere of things on which the mind, by its own effort, can throw no illumination. The Bible, in so far as it is made up of history, reflection, morals, scientific theory, has been superseded, like other products of man's thought. It still remains in a unique sense the word of God, when it is considered as revelation.

This word means literally an "unveiling," and was first applied to those utterances of later Jewish prophecy which set themselves to disclose the secrets of the unseen and the hereafter. In the New Testament the word is sometimes employed in this sense, and one book is emphatically called the "Revelation," since it consists entirely of prophecies and visions. The word, however, is not wholly satisfactory. It carries with it the suggestion of a hidden scene, exposed by the sudden lifting of a curtain; and in the apocalyptic writings full effect is given to this idea. Some wonderful spectacle, like a pageant in a theatre, is supposed to unroll itself before the eyes of the chosen seer.

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The knowledge imparted is novel and secret, and often has little purpose except to satisfy a vain curiosity. Christianity has too often been tempted to attach a similar meaning to revelation. It has surrounded its worship with an air of mystery. It has clung to doctrines which have appeared profound only because they were difficult and obscure. This, more than anything else, has tended to raise doubts about the Christian message. Men are wisely suspicious of all disclosures that can only be made in dimly lighted chambers. If there can be no revelation without all this wizardry and symbolism, may it not be that there is nothing at all behind the curtain?

The word, however, with its theatrical suggestion, is used comparatively seldom, either in the Old Testament or the New. We hear much more often of God speaking, making himself known, manifesting his power and his glory, drawing near to men, opening their eyes that they may see. What is revealed is not a secret, hidden away in a corner. It is something so great and wonderful that men had not dared to believe in its reality. The image always associated with revelation is that of light. Men have been ignorant of the glories which have always been around them, and now the light has risen. It is true that stress is constantly laid on the newness of what is revealed, but this does not mean that it is strange and occult. The newness consists in the change from surmise into reality, as when we actually see what we have hitherto only heard or read about. Men have been dimly aware that above this world there is another. They have dreamed that God cares for them, that he directs all things, that his will is

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one of love and righteousness. They know through revelation that all this is true. God himself speaks to them and gives them certainty.

Religion, therefore, is bound up with this idea of revelation. Properly speaking there can be no natural religion, for this term suggests that the world we know by our own faculties is the only one. The natural order is everything, and religion is part of it. But religion, even in its crudest forms, assumes the existence of a different order, which we cannot know unless it is revealed. Here, however, we have a problem which has perplexed religious thinkers in all ages. If there is a reality which lies beyond all visible things we are aware also that it is the ground of all things and of our own being. Are we to conceive of God as transcendent or as immanent? There is a difference here which marks the dividing line between two types of religion, and it is sometimes regarded as insuperable. Yet on the higher levels of all the great religions we find the two conceptions merging in each other. The Holy One who is enthroned above is known also as the pervading presence in the world around us. He is at once the Majesty in the heavens, whom men are to worship with infinite awe, and a God near to us, with whom we can hold the closest fellowship. Both conceptions are felt to be necessary, and a danger always arises when they are kept separate. When all stress is laid on God's transcendence he becomes unreal and remote; when he becomes purely immanent we have the pantheistic confusion of God with nature, or the mystical absorption of the soul into

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itself. The two conceptions must go together. They are two different modes of apprehending the same reality, which is at once the ground of all being and stands apart from it.

In the Old and New Testaments alike both conceptions find their place. God is the high and holy one, reigning in heaven, and yet there is always the sense of man's affinity with God. Man is made in God's image, and receives from him the breath of life. God dwells with the humble and contrite heart; he has made us for himself; he has searched and known us, and we are continually with him. It is this confidence that while he is transcendent he is yet near us which makes possible the idea of revelation. If there were no community between God and man, he could not reveal himself. Even if he spoke we should be unable to hear him; we should lack the faculty even of conceiving his existence. Not only so, but any revelation he might make would have no meaning for us. Since he was wholly apart from our life we could have no interest in his purpose; it could matter nothing to us whether there was a God or not. This, in fact, was the position adopted by Epicurus. He could not on rational grounds deny the fact of a divine reality, but he was content to assume that while the gods existed they lived wholly to themselves and were unconcerned with men. Knowledge of God becomes necessary only when we believe that although beyond us he is yet intimately related to us. So long as we are ignorant of him we are in darkness—powerless to direct our lives, blind to their true meaning. Religion is rooted in this conviction that the knowledge of God is the most imperative of all

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our needs, since only by knowing God we can know ourselves.

It follows, then, that if God reveals himself to man there must be something in man which can respond to him. In a sense he must be already known, for we are able to conceive of him, and to recognise him when he speaks. The revelation comes from without, as a great light, yet it manifests what has always been present to us. From this it might appear that the distinction between natural and revealed religion is a valid one. Do we not possess from the first, as part of our nature, a certain conception of God? Is it not possible, by a process of reflection, to clarify and develop this inborn knowledge of God, without demanding that he should somehow manifest himself from without? This is the assumption on which all schemes of natural religion are based, but they overlook one essential fact. Although we have that inborn sense of God, it is nevertheless revealed. This has been recognised by many thinkers, from Plato onwards, and is taken for granted by the Fourth Evangelist when he speaks of "the light which lighteth every man." As a creature of the natural order man is endowed with senses and faculties which make him capable of answering its requirements; but there is that in him which allies him to another and higher order. In the act of creating him as man, God placed his own mark upon him, and gave him a knowledge of God. A purely natural religion is impossible, since man can exercise his natural reason only on the facts of nature. By such a process, even if it were continued forever, we could never come any nearer to knowing God.

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We should travel endlessly within a closed circle, seeking for something which lay outside of it. When Laplace was asked by Napoleon whether he had allowed for God in his system of the universe, he answered, "I have found no need for such an hypothesis." The answer was a perfectly legitimate one. The scientific mind is bound to explain the world by its own categories, ignoring all conceptions which are outside of natural law. In so far as it brings them in, it ceases to be purely scientific. Man's reason must proceed along its own plane, and can never, of itself, arrive at religion.

But while there can be no natural religion, we must needs allow for what may be called a natural revelation—though it would be better described as an inward or antecedent revelation. As creatures of God, sharing in his mind and being, men are dimly aware from the first of that higher order, different from that of nature, to which they belong. All later revelation presupposes this one which has already been given. It imparts a new knowledge, and is yet, in a true sense, only an awakening.

This prior revelation, implicit in our very being, affords the point of contact between man and God. Without a common language there can be no instruction, and before God can speak his message we must have the capacity for understanding him. Yet from the inward revelation alone man could never know God. Those instincts in him which reach out to something beyond would lie dormant, and could excite nothing more than a bewilderment and a vague discomfort. The inward premonition begins to have meaning only when it meets with an answer. A

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message must come to it from without which makes it conscious of itself, as sounds come to a child and acquaint him with his sense of hearing. It is a fact of experience that the consciousness of God has always to be quickened by an impulse from without. The attempt has often been made to satisfy the religious need from the inward revelation alone. Thinkers of a certain temperament, in times and countries far remote—in ancient India and China and Egypt, in the Roman Empire, in mediæval Spain and Germany, and in our modern world—have followed the mystical way, confident that since God speaks to us from within he is to be met with in the depths of our own souls. There must be truth and value in a method which has offered itself spontaneously to such various minds, under conditions so widely different. Yet in all mystical religion there is an emptiness which cannot be wholly concealed by impressive and often beautiful language. All that is given to the mystic is an abstract certainty of God's existence. Nothing is learned of the nature of God, or the manner in which he must be served. The inward experience is confined to the bare assurance that the soul, for this one moment, is in contact with God. It is significant that mysticism, wherever we find it, assumes much the same form. In the Upanishads we have substantially the same ideas as re-appear, after hundreds or thousands of years, in Plotinus and Meister Eckhart and William Blake. The ideas are multiplied or modified, but always by a kind of self-fertilisation. Wherever mysticism has been religiously fruitful it has allied itself with some positive revelation, and in Christianity, above all, it has proved an

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element of priceless value. It is only when something is given to it from without that the mystical perception begins to have content. The God whom it apprehends ceases to be an abstraction, without name or quality, and becomes the living God.

The objection has often been raised, and is strongly advocated by some schools of thought in our own time, that these revelations from without have no validity. It is maintained that the God whom we think of as speaking to us is nothing but a projection of our own nature, the magnified shadow of man. We have desires, ideals, sympathies, which crave for something to respond to them, and the world around us becomes a screen on which they throw their image. To this illusion we attribute a real existence, and think of it as an infinite Personality which controls the universe. We persuade ourselves that this other and larger self has spoken to us, and so are confirmed in our belief that the God we worship has a real being. Religion thus arose out of an auto-suggestion, and in substance is nothing more, although in the course of ages it has gathered around it innumerable doctrines and observances from so-called revelations.

This account of religion is altogether contrary to the known facts. Men were first led to religion, not by some delusive image of themselves, but by the sense of a power which stood over against them, and which they usually regarded as hostile. They thought of this power as endowed with human moods and passions, but this did not mean that he was only their own reflection. They knew

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him as God for the very reason that he was other than man—a will which transcended their own and to which they were compelled to submit themselves. In the theory that man projects out of himself what he thinks has been revealed to him there is, indeed, this much of truth—that man has that in himself to which he seeks a response from the universe about him. He would assuredly never recognise the voice of God unless he had heard it first in his own soul. But this does not imply that the idea of God is his own creation, or that the revelation is only his own thought externalised. It means, rather, that what is present in himself meets him also in the world without, and is thereby explained and authenticated. The conception of God as only the magnified shadow of man ought, in fact, to be reversed. The shadow is in man, and he can make nothing of it until he discovers the reality to which it corresponds. When we see the sky reflected in a pool we do not reason that the sky, which appears to stretch above us, is only a mirage thrown out from the pool. It is the real sky, in all its immensity, and without it there would be no reflection.

Religion springs, therefore, from the belief that God, of whom man is dimly conscious in his own soul, reveals himself. The inward knowledge of God is confirmed and interpreted from without. It belongs to the nature of this revelation that it must be *given*. Man is confined to his own sphere of being, and of himself can have no conception of what lies beyond it. By no exertion of his own thought can he discover God, and God must in some way come to him. There is a barrier between the seen and the

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unseen which must be broken through from the other side. So all religions have based themselves on revelation; and this is not to be regarded as merely a primitive device to enforce beliefs which cannot be rationally proved. The idea of revelation answers to an instinctive knowledge on man's part that there is a sphere of being which he cannot himself discover. God cannot be known until he is revealed.

It was in the visible world of nature that men first looked for this self-revelation of God. The marvellous spectacle of the heavens and the earth has appeared in all times to manifest a divine power. In presence of it man has been overwhelmed with the sense of might, grandeur, beauty, majestic order. All religions have their beginning in some kind of nature-worship. The natural phenomena were themselves, in the earliest time, regarded as divine, and worship was offered to the sun, the mountains, the mysterious forces of vegetation, the stars and rivers and winds. With deeper reflection it was perceived that God must be sought not in nature but behind it. There must be one who has made the world. His wisdom is manifest in its harmony; his power in its resistless forces; his beneficence in its manifold provision for man's needs. We know the Creator through the works of his hands.

There will never be a time when men will cease to look on nature as the open book of God, but they have grown ever more conscious that this revelation is in itself insufficient. With the progress of scientific knowledge the natural world, instead of revealing God, has seemed to

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withdraw him. A veil has indeed been lifted, but behind it we see nothing but a tremendous mechanism to which our human lives mean nothing. The religious man confesses, with Pascal, that he is terrified by the infinite spaces, by those forces, vast beyond all reckoning, which crush him blindly like a reed. Revelation does not come to us from the material universe. We desire a message which will make us certain of God, in spite of the mighty system by which he is hidden.

This, indeed, is not the whole truth. God speaks to us in the visible world, and the immensity which frightens us has at the same time a spiritual value. Perhaps there is no better statement of what nature gives and does not give than in the words of Paul. "His invisible things are revealed through the things that are made, even his eternal power and divinity."² God is revealed by nature, but only in certain of his attributes. We are made to feel that over against us there is a divine power, before which we must bow in worship; but what is it? Nature speaks to us of God, but tells us nothing of his purpose, and does not even teach us whether he is unconscious force or intelligent will. Through nature we receive nothing that can properly be called a knowledge of God, and religion has always felt the need of getting beyond the natural revelation. Is it not possible that the unknown power, whose existence is proclaimed in nature, may in some way be disclosed to us?

This fuller revelation has been sought in Reason. As

² Romans 1:20.

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soon as man began to think he learned to regard this power of thought as the divine element in his being. He was native to the earth, and was one with all earthly things in the whole range of his physical life. But in virtue of his reason he knew himself as a creature apart. Here was something which lifted him out of the natural order, and from the reason in himself he inferred a larger reason to which it is the counterpart. This belief in reason as the revelation of God in man seemed to be borne out by all growing knowledge. The more the world was understood, the more it appeared to be the work of a great architect. Its parts were harmoniously planned, its movements were true to mathematical law, every effect had its cause. The principles of human thought were found to hold good for the whole universe, so that by knowledge of his own mind man could enter into the mind of God. This conception was first elaborated by the Greek thinkers, who aimed deliberately at a union with God through reason. It has never to be forgotten that the motive of Greek philosophy was fundamentally a religious one. Intellectual curiosity played its part, but Plato, Aristotle, and the great Stoic teachers were seeking, in the first instance, for what the New Testament calls eternal life. They cultivated reason in order to attain to God, the infinite reason. The true philosopher, as Plato describes him, hardly differs from the Christian saint. In all times since, the Greek conception has been dominant in philosophical enquiry. It has been assumed that in reason, the distinctive element in man, God has revealed himself, and that all other revelation must be tested by this one. Progress, as

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we commonly understand it, has consisted in nothing else than in the ever fuller recognition of the claim of reason to be the ultimate principle of the world.

Now it is true that man is an intelligent being, and that all his beliefs must seek to express themselves in rational form. It is true also that the reasoning power in man must have some affinity with the divine. However else we conceive of him, God is the eternal wisdom; that is involved in the very idea of God. To regard force or chance or empty will as the supreme fact in the universe is equivalent to saying that God does not exist. In a true sense our reason is the primary revelation. Our possession of it is the evidence and pledge that behind the visible order there is a higher reality which corresponds to it. Sooner or later the co-operation of reason is found to be necessary in all religions. (The data of revelation must be interpreted in some rational system.)

Nevertheless, the God who endows man with reason and who himself possesses it, cannot be apprehended by reason. This is acknowledged in all religion, and ultimately in all philosophy. In the history of every great school of thought we can invariably trace the same development. At first there is a complete confidence that by the application of rational methods all problems can be solved, but as the effort proceeds this confidence is lost. The effort seems to exhaust itself, or rather is brought up against an insuperable barrier. Greek rationalism dissolved in the mysticism of Plotinus and the later Stoics. In our own day science is gradually discarding its old categories and is falling back on metaphysic, as a prelude,

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we may surmise, to a further retreat. Men are rational beings, and never lose their faith in reason. There is always the hope that when it has gone just a little farther, when it has equipped itself more adequately, it will discover the secret of life and answer all the riddles of free-will and personality and consciousness. Yet this confidence proves in the end to be nothing but the hope of the desert pilgrim that in the next hour's march he will reach the lake that seems to be shining in front of him. Ever and again, in place of sure knowledge, we are left with barren speculation, or with the mournful confession "we can never know."

The truth is that reason is inherently incapable of attaining to the higher reality. Like water it cannot rise above its level, and it pertains to man's life within a given order of being. It exercises itself on data supplied by his senses, and with these data it can do marvellous things—weaving them into ever new combinations, drawing inferences from them as to hidden facts that lie beneath or above them. It can do so much with the order which it knows that it seems capable of reaching out to the order beyond, but this cannot be. In the life of reason we are confined to our own element as the fish is to water. This limitation of reason is apparent from the nature of speech, which is its instrument and in some degree its formative principle. "I gave him speech," says the Prometheus of Shelley, "and speech created thought, Which is the measure of the universe." Yet speech is all built up out of data of sense, and even in our ordinary life we constantly have experiences, emotions, premonitions for which there is no

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language. In those moments we have touched a range of existence which is beyond reason, and the instrument of reason is helpless.

It is not by reason, therefore, that we lay hold of the higher reality. Paul has declared "we know in part," and his observation is philosophically true. By reason we know something. We become aware that beyond the phenomenal world there is another, which to our own mind is inaccessible. In this negative sense reason offers us a revelation. It teaches us that there is something beyond itself, and to this extent it brings us to the knowledge of God. But it has no means of penetrating into that region of being which lies outside of its compass. If we are ever to learn anything of that world it must be revealed.

There is a third avenue of knowledge of which men have always been conscious. Along with his intelligence man is endowed with a moral nature. In the world around him, and even in other sentient beings there is nothing that corresponds to his sense of justice, truth, goodness; and yet for him its dictates are of absolute value. He knows, therefore, that they represent something which is beyond the material world. By means of them he is associated with a higher order. Since their claim on him is supreme he cannot but believe that they are from God, who must therefore be of a moral nature, in some measure akin to his own. Above all else in the universe there is a will to righteousness, and by obeying it men draw near to God.

It is this moral demand which bears on it most unmis-

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takably the stamp of revelation. Everywhere else in our life we are bound within the sphere of the visible; we are subject to the laws of necessity, and feel ourselves to be part of the material order. It is only in our moral activity that we rise completely out of the plane of the visible. There is here a difference in kind from everything we know in nature; the moral is, in a literal sense, the supernatural. Not only so, but in the moral life we obtain what is self-evidently a revealed knowledge. (1) In the first place, we are confronted with a demand. Something is imposed on us which is contrary to our natural inclination, contrary, at times, to all the admonitions of reason; and yet we are constrained to submit to it as to the highest good. How has it been laid on us? It must somehow have broken through the frontiers of that order which we know. It is given to us, by some power beyond. (2) Again, this moral demand comes instantaneously, by way of immediate vision. It does not require to justify itself, like a truth of reason, but carries with it its own authority. Why an action is right we most often do not know, and our arguments as to the why and wherefore have only the effect of confusing us. The knowledge is given to us directly, as if by a divine voice. (3) Once more, in the moral life, and here alone, we are conscious of freedom. Our natural world is a net-work of necessity, and while they move within it our thought and action are determined. As moral beings we exercise a free choice. We are lifted at once into a sphere of existence which is different in kind from the world we know.

It has been principally in this ethical field that men

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have looked for revelation, and have felt assured that it came to them. This holds true even in the most primitive religions, where it was always with reference to action that the gods were consulted. It was not merely that practical guidance was urgently necessary, but there was a feeling, almost from the first, that revelation had to do with conduct. In early times, as among the more primitive races still, men accepted the world as they found it. They were not lacking in intelligence or curiosity, but they believed that a limit was prescribed to human knowledge which it was impious to transgress. This conviction that "the secret things belong unto God"³ has been so strong and persistent that, with the mass of people, science has hardly yet won its full right of way. But it was always recognised that the inhibition did not extend to the field of conduct. Man was free to enquire into God's will, and the refusal to ascertain it was impious. It is the constant complaint of the Old Testament prophets that a revelation is offered to Israel, and they will not hear it.

The motives for enquiring of God were often crude and self-seeking. He was asked to reveal, not so much the course of action that was morally right, as that which would ensure health, prosperity, triumph over enemies. The desire to know God's will has seldom been disinterested either in ancient times or now. Yet beneath all the confusion of motive men have believed that God will reveal his will to those who devoutly seek it. They have recognised that apart from their own will there is this higher one to which they must conform.

³ Deut. 29:29.

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It cannot be doubted that in our life as moral beings we obtain our surest knowledge of a supernatural order. The distinctive element in every religion is to be found in its ethical teaching. Yet the idea of revelation disappears when the whole emphasis is thrown on the ethical, as existing by itself. It is often contended in our own day that everything else in religion may be discarded as mere shell or wrapping, and that even the belief in God is nothing but a survival from primitive thought. We are told that what religion has given us as a permanent possession is the knowledge of certain moral principles, which are valid in their own right, apart from any divine sanctions. Religion, it is granted, has done a priceless service in affirming and conserving those moral values, but its task is finished. What it essentially stood for can now be set free from all the useless accretions of faith and doctrine and worship.

The attempt to reduce religion to its purely moral elements is no new one. "Why consult the god?" asks the Roman Stoic in Lucan's poem; "the course of duty is plain, and no oracle will make it plainer."⁴ It is a noble sentiment, but all experience has proved that a moral system, without a root in religion, is powerless. Even the ethic of the New Testament seems to lose its virtue when it is presented merely as an ethic. For the truth is that the religious belief is not simply a wrapping for the ethic but its very life and substance. That which gives value to the moral demands is the assurance that they reflect the will of God and that by obeying them we attain to the higher

⁴ Lucan, *Pharsalia*, IX, 570-72.

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life. Huxley once observed, not unjustly, that the whole of the Bible teaching is contained in the one verse of Micah: "What hath the Lord required of thee but to do justice, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"⁵ He maintained that if this verse were preserved, all the ritual and dogma might be left out, as mere framework or amplification. But when the verse is examined the whole force of it is found to lie in the opening words, "The Lord requires of thee." Take these away and there is only the ethical common-place that a man should be just and merciful. The verse stands out as one of the great utterances of religion because the moral truth is invested with a divine significance. We are made to realise that in doing justice and mercy we have part in the life of God. A maxim which is nothing in itself but a moral reflection takes on it the character of revelation.

A distinction must thus be made between ethical and religious truth. It may be granted that revelation has for its main purpose the knowledge of God's commandments, and for this an enlightened moral sense may seem to be sufficient. Yet morality by itself does not take us beyond the natural sphere. Aristotle built up a great ethical system on principles of reason as applied to human action. Modern thinkers have sought to demonstrate that from considerations of mere utility or from the necessary conditions of social life, an ethical code may be deduced which appears, on the surface, to be little different from that of the Gospels. We cannot but ask ourselves what place there is for revelation if morality is the heart of

⁵ Micah 6:8.

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religion. The answer is that morality is not an end in itself but the means to an end. In religion we seek the knowledge of God, who is the source and the goal of the moral law. We cannot know him except through obedience to his will, but the true end of religion, and of life itself, is to know God.

CHAPTER II

REVELATION IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

THE Hebrew religion was grounded in the belief that God, willing to make himself known to men, had chosen Israel to be his people. This idea of Israel as the nation to which God has spoken meets us everywhere in the Old Testament, and passed unquestioned into Christian thought. Down to our own day it has been taken for granted that while God nowhere left himself without a witness his revelation through Israel was unique in its character. All other knowledge of God was obscure and accidental, and had only a secondary value. The authentic stream of revelation flowed down through Israel.

This position can no longer be maintained in the old theological sense. We would now recognise that under all forms of worship men have found access to God. In every religion that has been sincerely held he has made himself known to those who sought him. Yet the more we learn of other religions the more does it become apparent that Israel was indeed a chosen people to which God revealed himself more clearly than to any other. Almost from the beginning the Hebrew mind had laid hold of the cardinal principles that God is one, that he is a righteous God, that he cannot be represented by any

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material image, that he is directing all things towards a final purpose. All religions, as they outgrow the primitive phase, have found themselves obliged to adopt these principles, and have done so, for the most part, imperfectly and too late. Israel had set out with a conception of God to which man's adult mind could yield assent, as in full accordance with the nature of things. "The Jewish religion," as a Greek observer expressed it, "is more philosophical than any other." But the principles which gave this character to the religion had been reached, not by philosophical thinking but by immediate perception. God had, in some manner, revealed himself.

It is significant that few of the speculative questions which we are wont to regard as primary are ever raised, either in the Old Testament or the New. No proof, for instance, is attempted of the existence of God. It is not because no doubt had yet arisen as to this fundamental postulate of all religion. We know that in all times men have sought arguments for the existence of God, and that in Palestine, as in Greece, there were sceptical minds which doubted everything. The prophets, however, while they rebuke those doubts, never feel it necessary to answer them. In like manner they offer no proof of the unity of God or of his spiritual nature. They protest against the idolatry which is raising its head on every side, but never try to meet it by argument. The reason is that their beliefs are not intellectual assumptions, which might or might not be true. Their knowledge of God is a fact of vision and experience. He has spoken to them, and their one care is to make his word plain to others. It is some-

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times said that the Bible merely takes for granted those ultimate conceptions of which we most crave to be assured. This is not strictly true. When the prophet declares "Thus saith the Lord," he means to imply that he is not making a bare assertion. He grounds the truth he proclaims in a knowledge of God which he seeks to communicate to those who hear him. If they are conscious of God as he is himself they cannot but believe this message which God has given. The Bible teaching everywhere rests on evidence, but it is evidence of a different kind from that employed by the historian or man of science. The appeal is always to a revelation. Those to whom God has revealed himself will understand the word of God.

According to the Old Testament the revelation is made to Israel as a people. "Hear, O Israel" is the regular prophetic formula. The message is given through individual men, but they are only the organs through which it comes to the elect community. This idea is no doubt bound up with the national character of Hebrew religion. It is Israel that God cares for. It is the nation that appears before God and serves him, and each Israelite belongs to God in virtue of his membership in the holy nation. Religiously the people is viewed as one individual, and when God makes a revelation he is supposed to make it to the people, all the more so as it is concerned almost always with the common worship, the national loyalty, the separation of Israel from the heathen.

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This, however, is not the whole explanation. The Hebrew prophet, as we first meet him, was a private oracle whom men and women consulted for their personal guidance. He became a revealer, in the higher sense, only when he began to occupy himself with national instead of private interests. It has often been contended that Hebrew religion failed of its purpose until it succeeded in freeing itself from the tribal outlook, and offered a message to the individual. The truth is rather that it was through their nationalism that the great prophets arrived at their purer conceptions. In their effort to think of God as concerned with the common welfare they discerned the principles on which he acted in his government of the world. To be sure they thought only of the one nation, Israel, but in their sympathy with it they won the necessary breadth of vision.

There was thus a genuine religious value in the Hebrew idea of revelation as made to the people. A touch-stone was provided by which the divine counsels could be distinguished from the hasty and partial judgments of men. We hear much of "false prophets" who professed to speak in the name of God. From all that we can learn of them they seem to have been zealous and well-meaning men; but they were "false" because they were one-sided—identifying the cause of God with some given man or party. The true prophet knew himself to be God's messenger in so far as he could rise above his own wishes or those of any sectional group. He sought to know what would be right for the whole nation and would secure its lasting

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welfare. Because his message had this larger validity he was certain that it was from God.

Behind the idea of revelation, as we find it in the prophets, there was a long history; and the later modes of thought continued to be affected by the traditions of the earlier period. The word of God was first associated with magical incantations, Urim and Thummim, dreams and visions, angelic appearances, fanciful conceptions of a world of spirits. Much of this ancient machinery is still preserved in the language of the great prophets. They describe the message as coming to them in sleep or trance. They assume that they stand in the succession of the primitive seers, and are subject to like moods of mind and body. They make predictions of what will happen to particular men, and interpret casual incidents as signs from heaven. All this belongs to a convention which had taken form in a previous age, and has little to do with the real prophetic idea; but it cannot be entirely dismissed as a mere survival. It bears witness, for one thing, to a strong conviction that the message has come supernaturally. Perhaps the prophets did not literally believe that they had seen visions, but while their language is figurative they were none the less conscious that they were not speaking from themselves. God had instructed them, and they expressed this mysterious fact in the traditional manner. A poet today may describe himself as listening to heavenly voices or drinking from a sacred well. He attaches no literal meaning to the old imagery, but it answers to something real. He knows, just as surely as

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the ancient poets, that his thought has been given to him, in a manner he cannot explain. Again, we are reminded by the prophetic language of a psychological fact which must be reckoned with in the whole history of revelation. Man's ordinary life moves on a level, and his thought is under the control of calm reason; but now and then he has the feeling, if only for a moment, of being caught out of himself. Some truth is flashed in upon him which he could never have reached by his normal thinking. At such times, too, the imagination is highly excited, so that an idea in itself abstract takes on a concrete form, and is perhaps accompanied by some kind of vision. These strange workings of the mind are still inexplicable, and it is not surprising that in ancient times the inward experience was confounded with objective reality. The dreamer was convinced that an angel stood visibly before him, or that he was transported out of his surroundings into an unknown world. In all ages revelation has been associated with ecstasy. It has been assumed that a man must be lifted out of his conscious self before he can hold communion with God. This idea, in primitive phases of culture, expressed itself in crude forms, with the result that madness and intoxication were often supposed to be necessary means of divine enlightenment. Yet beneath these childish imaginations there was an idea of permanent value. Revelation must always be, in some sense, ecstatic. A mere frenzy in which clear consciousness is lost will only blur all spiritual discernment; but it is none the less true that there can be no insight without rapture. Only when a man has escaped from himself and

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from the limitations of his ordinary thought does he become fully aware of something beyond. The ecstatic mood is itself the best evidence of the fact of revelation. In those exalted moments it is made clear to us that our knowledge is not dependent solely on processes of reason. There are times in the life of every man when intimations are flashed in upon him from an unseen world.

In Hebrew religion, then, as we know it in its later phases, the primitive ideas of divine manifestation disappear, or survive only by way of symbolism. God's messenger is no longer the raving seer but the prophet, who speaks from an inward enlightenment. What is the nature of his inspiration? To this question there is no direct answer, and could not be. The prophet would not have been a prophet if he was free to analyse his own mental condition at the moment of receiving a divine message. He is absorbed in the message itself, and is content to know that God has sent it. Sometimes he sees it confirmed by a sign in nature, or in contemporary history, or in his own life; but he points to these evidences only to convince his hearers, and for himself he requires no proof. This sense of immediacy always accompanies the prophet's message. He has seen the truth, and perceives in the same moment that it is true. It does not follow that all had happened instantaneously. Amos, Isaiah, Jeremiah had been meditating for years on the ways of God, and much of their teaching is hardly to be distinguished from the practical wisdom which comes from study and experience. Yet in the conclusions at which they arrive there is always an element of sudden-

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ness—expressed in the formula “The word of the Lord came unto me.” Not only so, but the prophet is conscious of a compulsion, to which he must needs submit. “The Lord has spoken; who can but prophesy?”¹ “I restrained myself, but thy word was like a fire in my bones.”² A power has taken possession of the man, and is using him as its instrument. With this sense of immediacy and compulsion there is also a conviction that the message has an absolute value. “Thus saith the Lord.” The prophet has pondered the matter before him; he is aware of all the alternative courses which might be followed. But now he has discovered what God wills. The question has been taken out of his hands and has been decided once for all by the supreme Judge.

The prophets are thus bent on discovering the ultimate principles to which human action must be conformed. In this respect they may be compared with Aristotle, Kant, and the other great ethical thinkers, who likewise seek to establish morality on an unassailable basis. Yet it is at once evident that the work of the prophets is entirely different from that of the philosophers. They do not proceed by a method of analysis and logical deduction. They do not compare the various motives of action, and select from them that which is rationally valid. On the contrary they sweep aside all argument and theory in sharp and final pronouncements. Man, they declare, must be guided solely by the will of God. He must seek to know God and do what God requires of him, without reserve or question. In the last resort the prophets are

¹ Amos 3:8.

² Jer. 20:9.

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not concerned with ethical principles. Their task is purely a religious one—to bring men to the knowledge of God, who alone can show them the true path of life.

What is meant by this knowledge of God? The phrase is always recurring in the Old Testament, and carries with it a great variety of suggestion. Sometimes it is used in little more than a formal sense. To know God is to hold the true religion, as contrasted with heathen idolatry, and all that is involved in this kind of knowledge is a faithful observance of the rites and customs which pertain to the traditional worship. Sometimes an understanding of religion is implied, as well as a formal practice. To know God is to hold a right conception of him, and to meditate on his works and judgments. In the later period there has grown up something like a theology, and the knowledge of God entails a study of the Law and of the sacred traditions and beliefs. But the characteristic Old Testament idea contains two elements, which were likewise combined, at a later time, in the Christian conception. It is assumed, on the one hand, that knowledge of God is not so much intellectual as moral and practical. Man attains to knowledge of God by serving him; or rather, obedience to God is itself right knowledge. "He did judgment and justice; he judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well with him. Was not this to know me, saith the Lord."³ Israel is a nation that knows God in so far as it stands on a higher moral plane than the surrounding heathen. Again and again, in spite of

³ Jer. 22:15, 16.

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their observance of outward ritual, the people are condemned for their want of knowledge. They have failed to do God's will, and since he is the righteous one he is known only to the righteous. "There is no truth or mercy, no knowledge of God in the land."⁴

But along with this ethical element there is one which is purely religious. Those who know God are those who are alive to his presence. In contrast to him who has knowledge there is the "fool," who is aware only of what he perceives with his senses. He looks out on the world and sees in it no suggestion of anything beyond the visible. He looks on human life, and never suspects that God is judging the righteous and the wicked. "Having eyes he sees not." He lives on the surface of things, and the working of a divine purpose is hidden from him. Thus the knowledge of God is the active sense of God; it is the perception of a higher order over and underneath the material one. In its essence it has nothing to do with intellectual knowledge, and men admired for their wisdom are yet classed among the "fools." The true knowledge depends on an "opening of the eyes"—a faculty of vision. It comes only to those who fear God, and is the accompaniment and the reward of a clean heart.

This religious conception of the knowledge of God coincides to a large extent with the moral one. It is a knowledge which is imparted to the good man, and is constantly identified in the Psalms with the practice of God's holy law. At the same time the spiritual discernment which belongs to goodness is something more than

⁴ Hosea 4:1.

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a moral quality. It is called "knowledge" because that term alone can in some measure define it. "The secret of the Lord is with those who fear him."⁵ By service of God men attain not only to peace and well-being but to an insight which can penetrate into the heart of things. Their wisdom is different in kind from ordinary wisdom, and brings with it a deeper, clearer apprehension of truth.

This knowledge which comes to the good man is sometimes conceived almost mystically, as an inward communion with God so deep and immediate that he who enjoys it participates in the mind of God. "In thy light we shall see light."⁶ "Nevertheless I am continually with thee."⁷ This element in the Old Testament idea was to come to its own in Christianity, through contact with Hellenistic thought. Of itself, however, the Hebrew mind did not turn inward. It conceived of God, not as present somehow in the depths of man's own soul, but as enthroned above the world, and only to be approached with dread and worship. "Knowledge" has therefore to be given to man from without. God is remote and invisible, but makes himself known to his servants. How is it that he is thus revealed?

The revelation in nature plays a great part in the Old Testament. In all the writings, and more especially in the Psalms and the book of Job, we meet with magnificent passages of natural description which stand almost alone in ancient literature. To this day the feeling for nature has never found a richer and more vivid expression

⁵ Psalms 25:14.

⁶ Psalms 36:9.

⁷ Psalms 73:23.

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than in these Hebrew writers. But their feeling is much more than one of instinctive joy in the world around them. They are indeed responsive to the wonder of the heavens, the mountains, the forest and fruitful field, the innumerable forms of life, but what they look for everywhere is the revelation of God. Sometimes they might appear to find it simply in the testimony that nature affords to its Maker. The nineteenth Psalm is paraphrased in Addison's well-known hymn as if it were nothing but a statement of the argument from design. The stars address themselves to "reason's ear," and are forever singing "the hand that made us is divine." But the Psalmist never doubted the existence of God, and required no proof of it. Neither was he concerned with anything that the stars might say to "reason's ear." His mood is one of sheer rapture, and this is always the mood of those Hebrew poets. They do not argue from nature but exult in it, and in the God whom it reveals to them. What they seek from the mighty spectacle around them is nothing else than communion with God. Through nature they become aware of an order which is above nature and in which all desires are satisfied. So in this same Psalm the writer passes at once from contemplation of the heavens to thought of God's law. The two majesties are linked together in his mind, and convey one meaning. Alike in his creation and in his perfect law, God manifests himself and gives us fellowship with him. It is to be noted that this feeling for nature which we find in the Old Testament is not the pantheistic one. There is never a suggestion that nature is itself divine;

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this is only a heathen error which awakens scorn and revulsion. God is not to be confused with the world, for he has made it and is above it, and its most impressive objects are only his handiwork. It is this which gives them grandeur and significance. Since they are made by God they bear his signature and offer to men, at least in reflection, the vision of what he is. The one effort of the Old Testament writers is to apprehend nature in this light. Lebanon and the seas and the heavens are themselves nothing, and we must look beyond them. "Lift up your eyes and behold; who hath created these things, that bringeth out their host by number? He calleth them all by names in the greatness of his might."⁸ Through nature we are to find this knowledge of God.

For the Old Testament, however, God is above all the God of righteousness. In this aspect of his being he cannot be known through nature, and the fuller revelation must be sought in the life of men. Ultimately it is given in those deep human instincts which testify to truth and justice as the highest good. Through these certainties which he has implanted in us God himself is speaking to men and making his will known. So the prophets turn away from all conventional standards and appeal to those principles of right which all men find themselves compelled to recognise. Their aim is to interpret those principles, and thus to achieve a fuller knowledge of God. Prophetic teaching may be said to culminate in the great passage of Jeremiah which foretells the time when all

⁸ Isaiah 40:26.

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men will know God through the inward moral law. "This shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel. After these days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts and write it in their hearts, and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall no more teach every man his neighbour and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord; for they shall all know me from the least to the greatest of them, saith the Lord."⁹ The prophets seek even now to make men attentive to this law of God which each one can read for himself. Their grand achievement consists in this discovery of the eternal moral principles, given in the very constitution of man's nature. Yet here again it is to be noted that the Hebrew mind does not act introspectively. The moral law is not understood by any method of philosophical analysis, but by observing how it asserts itself in action. When men examine their lives they can perceive that evil brings its own punishment, that by right conduct they secure happiness, peace of mind, joy in their children. Amidst all that is accidental in life they can distinguish a few principles which are sure and fundamental. Old Testament morality is apt, for this reason, to impress us as empirical and based merely on utilitarian motives; and in the popular ethic of Israel, as of all other nations, these were no doubt the motives that chiefly weighed. In the higher teaching, however, the idea of material reward falls out of sight. It is realised that what we obtain from experience is nothing else than knowledge of God. Through his dealings with us God

⁹ Jer. 31:33, 34.

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teaches us to understand his will and to find in our fellowship with him the supreme good. In perhaps the greatest of all the Psalms the writer examines his life, and confesses that his service of God has not brought him the expected rewards. But a light breaks in upon him, and he sees that he has been brutish and ignorant. God has indeed rewarded him, giving him what is more in value than riches and length of days. "Whom have I in heaven but thee, and there is nought on earth that I desire besides thee."¹⁰ In like manner the book of Job may be regarded as a voyage of discovery, in quest of the true purpose of life. It is found at last in the assurance that God reigns above the world. Through his very calamities Job has attained, in the knowledge of God, to the one thing which is worth having.

This revelation through experience is given, most decisively, in the history of the nation. It is the standing problem of the Old Testament that the moral law, to which we owe an absolute obedience, appears so often to break down. The innocent suffers instead of the guilty. The good man dies before his time, while the wicked enjoys a long and prosperous life. In face of this manifest injustice the law of God, which is written in men's hearts, might seem to be illusory. Does not life pronounce its judgment in favour of the "fool," who denies the righteous God? Many answers are sought to this problem, but there is one on which the teaching of the prophets may be said to turn. God is working towards a purpose which cannot fulfil itself within the narrow limits of the individual life, and we must take into account the wider life of the nation. Those principles of

¹⁰ Psalms 73:25.

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right which cannot assert themselves in man's life when we see it in fragments become apparent when we view it in the large. It was by their effort to establish this truth that the Hebrew writers became the first who can justly be called historians. In earlier literature we have only the disjointed chronicle of things that happened. The authors of the historical books in our Old Testament look not so much to the events as to the continuous purpose which was unfolding itself through the chance and confusion. They are not concerned, however, like modern historians, with a political or social development. Their interest is solely in the revelation of God's will. On that larger scene of the national life he shows plainly that injustice meets with punishment, that truth and mercy are the way to peace, that right is always victorious in spite of seeming disaster. For the prophets history is a book of revelation, where men can read the will of God, written in large characters. In our personal life we may see nothing at work but the play of our own will and of earthly circumstances. In history we grow aware of the higher will, to which all events are tributary.

Along with nature and the moral law the Old Testament recognises a third source from which we receive knowledge of God. For Hebrew thought God is a personal being, and communion with him is personal, like "that of a man with his friend." It is not enough, therefore, to know God through nature as the sovereign might and wisdom; or through the moral law as the power which makes for righteousness. An abstract conception of this

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kind misses that element which is essential in the knowledge of God. Although he is other than man and cannot be represented by any human image, yet there is that in him which corresponds with the personal life in man. Only when we so apprehend him can we enter into that relation to him which is meant in the Old Testament as knowledge.

It is through human persons, and in no other way, that God can be known as personality. From this conviction the Christian message takes its departure, and it has sometimes been thought unaccountable that such a belief should have grown up within Judaism, which insisted so strongly on the absolute separateness of God from man. But the truth is that the Christian idea is implicit in the Old Testament. More than any other sacred book it is a book of personalities. It presents each phase of the religion of Israel under the light of a covenant, made through some pre-eminent servant of God. The lives of outstanding men—Abraham, Moses, David, Elijah, Jeremiah—are so closely associated with the religious teaching that they are not merely its framework but an integral part of it. Those men were the messengers through whom the revelation was given, but they were much more. They belonged to the revelation. God so reflected himself in their lives and characters that through them men were brought near to God and learned to know him. In the face of Moses the people saw the light of God. Isaiah, Hosea, Jeremiah could offer themselves as “signs”—visible pledges of what God was doing for Israel. A clear distinction is always drawn between such men and the official servants of reli-

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gion. In Israel, as elsewhere, there were priests, wise men, professional orders of prophets; due reverence was paid them, and they were consulted as the accredited agents by whom God made known his will. But it was understood that they were so privileged in virtue of their office. They were mouth-pieces through whom the divine word was transmitted, and are rarely mentioned by name. Very different is the place assigned to those other men, who were expressly chosen by God. They bear no specific priestly character. Their weaknesses and limitations are frankly acknowledged, and they are themselves conscious of their unworthiness to speak for God. All this, however, gives added significance to their message. It moves and quickens us because it comes through living messengers, of like passions with ourselves. At a later time, when scripture was accepted as the literal word of God, the human agent was conceived as nothing but the passive instrument of the divine voice. This theory, which was meant to safeguard the revelation, suppressed the very element in it which was most essential. Unless he is reflected in a human life God cannot be rightly known to men.

It is to be noted that in the Old Testament no place is allowed to the demigod, who is a familiar figure in almost every religion. One feels that in later Judaism Moses has in some measure been transformed into such a figure. Although a man he is surrounded with a nimbus which sets him apart from common humanity. He is himself identified with the supernatural law which he proclaims. But in the Old Testament it is not because of some mysterious quality in their origin or nature that certain men repre-

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sent God. They are simply men who are entirely dedicated to God. They are human personalities so possessed with the sense of God that he shines through them and becomes real to the world. All through the Old Testament we meet with this idea of the man who conforms his own will to that of God, and who thus, in some degree, makes God present. It comes to its clearest expression in the great prophecy of the Suffering Servant in Second Isaiah. No interpretation of these chapters which has yet been offered is wholly satisfactory; but whatever may have been the precise conception in the prophet's mind his essential meaning is plain. He feels profoundly that God is not truly known until his will is manifested in human personality. God is made real to us through the Servant of God.

For the Old Testament, therefore, God is revealed in nature, in human experience, in great personalities which make his message living and intelligible. In all these different ways we learn to know God, and the knowledge can be summed up in certain beliefs, which are set forth by the prophets with matchless force and impressiveness. Above all, they recognise in the moral law the will of God. As ruler of the universe he maintains everywhere those principles of righteousness which we find written in our hearts. To know God, however, is something more than to know the moral law. An ethical rule, however perfect and however faithfully observed, does not carry with it a revelation of God. What we seek to know is not the moral law itself but the God whose will it expresses.

We come here to a conception which pervades the Old

Testament, and which was destined to a yet fuller development in Christianity. It meets us in a great variety of forms, but they are all associated with the word "glory."¹¹ We are made to feel that God is truly known according as we perceive his glory. Behind this word there is a long history, reaching back to dim religions far anterior to that of Israel. In its Hebrew form it suggests the idea of weight, and was hence used in a general sense to denote grandeur and authority. At an early time it was transferred from the majestic object itself to the halo that seemed to surround it. All that transcended the ordinary conditions of humanity was supposed to throw out a kind of radiance. A king was invested with splendid raiment, as the visible sign of something in his person that struck awe into the onlooker and dazzled him. Spiritual beings were conceived as emanating a brightness. In a unique degree God himself was the King of glory. Although invisible he was made manifest by the light which radiated from him and clothed him like a garment. When Moses communed with him on Sinai this mysterious light overspread the mountain. When his people appeared before him in the Temple the holy place was filled with his glory. In the earlier time this idea was understood quite literally. It was believed that God dwelt in light, and that men were conscious of this brightness when they drew near to him in rapture or vision. But in the maturity of Hebrew thought the glory ceased to be regarded as a mere physical light. In so far as the old idea survived

¹¹ The history and meaning of this term have been very fully investigated by Doctor J. Schneider (*Doxa: eine bedeutungs-geschichtliche Studie*).

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it was used symbolically for a spiritual quality which pertained to God, and which could not be expressed. God is different from men, and in everything that is made or done by him there is something that marks this difference. It cannot be defined, but in contact with it men at once recognise it and are filled with awe. So the glory of God is not one of his attributes but is common to all. His power, his mercy, his wisdom all reflect his nature as an uncreated being. The word "glory," wherever it occurs, might almost be translated by "divinity." What God is, in his essential nature, we cannot know, but we are aware in his presence of something infinitely high above us. All else we can in some measure understand and explain, but of God's work we can only say "it is outside of our knowledge; it is divine." In Hebrew thought there is always this sense of the intrinsic difference between the earthly and the divine order. Men can display wisdom, justice, goodness; but in God these human qualities take on a new character. "Thy mercy, O Lord, is in the heavens and thy faithfulness reacheth unto the clouds."¹² In the moral action of God there is that which reveals him as a divine being. So in their contemplation of nature it is this element of "glory" which impresses the Old Testament poets. They realise that in these works of God there is something which belongs to a higher, invisible order. "The heavens declare the glory of God." We grow aware, as we behold them, of a light which proceeds not only from the sun and stars. Through all his creation, as through a transparent substance, there shines the presence of God.

¹² Psalms 36:5.

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The Old Testament idea of revelation is bound up, in the last resort, with this other idea of glory. Later thought made a chasm between the transcendent God and his creation. A time came when even his name might not be spoken, and the great problem was to conceive how God, the unknowable, could enter into any relation with the world. For the Old Testament thinkers this problem did not exist. God was indeed separate from the world; he was the high and holy one, the Lord of glory. Yet this glory which belonged to his inherent being streamed out from him. For those who had eyes to see, it irradiated all his works. The earth is his Temple in which everything says "glory."¹³ Yet while God thus manifests himself there are few who can discern him. For the most part they look at the world and at human life externally, as presented to their senses, and know nothing of the higher order which gleams through the visible. "They regard not the work of the Lord and the operation of his hands."¹⁴ Revelation consists in an opening of the eyes, so that behind the show of things that "glory," which bears witness to a divine presence, may be apparent.

The conception of glory is closely related to another, which also meets us continually in the Old Testament—that of holiness. At times the two ideas seem to be almost identical. They both define what is peculiar to the divine nature as contrasted with created being. As God is the Lord of glory, so he is the holy one, separate from the world. As he touches with his own glory everything he has made, so in all that speaks of him there is something

¹³ Psalms 29:9.

¹⁴ Isaiah 5:12.

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of his holiness. His priests, his sanctuaries, the offerings made to him, all things connected with his service are holy. In itself the idea is non-ethical, and denotes simply that sphere of being which is apart from that which we know, and which commands our dread and reverence.¹⁵ But since God is the righteous one, all that is righteous is also holy. In later thought holiness becomes synonymous with righteousness, although it marks not so much its ethical quality as the divine nature which it reflects. All that partakes of God's righteousness is thereby separated from the sinful world.¹⁶

There is this difference, however, between the two conceptions. Where "holiness" is negative, defining what God is not, "glory" is positive. It suggests an ineffable light thrown out from absolute perfection. It sums up all those attributes of divine nature which make it divine. In presence of the holy we are afraid; as mortal men we shrink from that which is aloof and inexplicable. As we behold the glory of God we are filled with joy, knowing that in God there is fulness of life. It is true that the two conceptions tend to fuse together. "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of thy glory."¹⁷ But for the most part the holiness and glory of God correspond to the two different attitudes with which men may regard him. He is so far beyond us that we scarcely dare even to utter his name. Yet this God who is apart

¹⁵ The origin and meaning of the conception are discussed in Otto's classical work, *Das Heilige*.

¹⁶ On the basis of Otto's work a Norwegian scholar (R. Afting, *Die Heiligkeit im Urchristentum*) has shown how the primitive conception was transformed under the influence of Christian beliefs.

¹⁷ Isaiah 6:3.

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from us reveals himself. He is above all things but has made them all, and through them we can discern his glory.

To sum up—it belongs to the essence of Hebrew thought that God, who is exalted above the heavens, yet makes himself known. He cannot be apprehended by man's sense or reason, for he is outside of that visible world which is open to our human faculties; and since he cannot be reached by man he himself comes to man through revelation. All that man can do is to wait on God, in that attitude of trust and reverence and obedience which will enable him to receive God's message. The knowledge of God is thus more practical than intellectual, but to those who serve him God imparts a wisdom to which the mind can never attain. Sometimes he speaks to them in trance or vision, and even apart from those special messages he is revealing himself always, in the wonders of his creation, in the experiences of life, in the unfolding of his purposes in history. Almost from the beginning it was evident to the Hebrew thinkers that man, as a moral being, has part in a supernatural order. It is therefore in the moral life that God is most directly known. At the same time the prophets are much more than ethical teachers, for whom religion means nothing else than the right conduct of life. What they are always seeking for is the knowledge of God. They are concerned with the moral law in order that through it they may know God who ordained it, and whose mind it reflects. There is here a principle which is fundamental to the idea

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of revelation both in the Old Testament and the New, and the neglect of it has led to serious confusion, more than ever in our own time. It is often assumed that religion has no other aim than to affirm and clarify the moral law, which, in the last resort, is what we mean by God. The prophets, we are told, were the first who understood religion in this sense. They condemned the formal worship and the doctrinal traditions of their day, and threw the whole emphasis on the moral law. This, however, is not the purpose of the prophets. They do not speak of knowing righteousness but of knowing God. They believe that he is revealed in the moral law and in human history and in the order and beauty of nature. Everywhere they are conscious of a "glory," shining out from that divine power who made the world and is yet apart from it. How can they discern the glory so that through it they may apprehend God himself? This, in the Old Testament, is the ultimate meaning of the knowledge of God.

CHAPTER III

REVELATION IN THE APOCALYPTIC LITERATURE

THE word "revelation" is connected in a specific sense with the literature which arose in Palestine after the Old Testament period, and was still flourishing in the first century of our era. A Christian "apocalypse" found its way into the New Testament, and was regarded, almost to our own time, as unique. It was believed that for once, in this strange book, the curtain which hides the future was partially withdrawn, and countless attempts were made to spell out the mysterious visions. We now know that this Apocalypse, so far from standing alone, was modelled on Jewish writings of the same character which at one time must have been very numerous. Within the last century some thirty or forty of these writings have been recovered, in whole or part, and the study of them has become an important branch of Biblical criticism. Few of the documents have much intrinsic merit, and from every point of view our book of Revelation is by far the finest example of the school to which it belongs. Yet the literature is of the utmost value for the light it throws on the background of Christian thought. Our religion, as we can now see, was in some respects the outcome of the apocalyptic movement.

In the form in which we now know it, apocalyptic was

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one of the later products of Judaism, but it goes back, in substance, to the beginnings. As soon as they learn to think men find themselves faced with ultimate problems which they try in childish fashion to answer. How did the world begin, and how will it end? What is the nature and origin of the soul? What will happen to it after death? Among the most ancient elements of every religion is some kind of tradition or speculation about the unseen world; and Judaism was in this respect no exception. Here and there throughout the Old Testament we meet with ideas, evidently familiar to the people, concerning the things that will come to pass in the last days. The prophets employ these popular beliefs from time to time as the framework of their teaching. They speak of a day of the Lord and a coming Judgment.¹ They look back to a lost Paradise which will finally be restored. They know of angelic powers which have rebelled against God and in the end will be overcome. In the Old Testament, however, these beliefs remain in the background. The prophets are pre-occupied with urgent questions of the present. Intent on the realities of religion they have little time for mythical speculation. But in a later day, when the great religious impulse which created prophecy was dying down, the old beliefs pressed again into the fore-front. Israel, moreover, had now come in contact with alien religions, especially with that of Persia, which was based on an elaborate doctrine of the spiritual world. Persian and Old Testament ideas were thrown together, and out of this intermingling there emerged the new type

¹ Amos 5:18; Isaiah 2:11; Psalms 50. Isaiah 11:7 *f.*; 35:1. Isaiah 14:12.

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of thought which comes before us in the apocalyptic writings.

These books, as we read them now, appear merely fantastic. Their authors break away deliberately from all real conditions and project themselves into a cloudland of symbol and speculation. But as we look deeper we can discern a purpose in this strange literature, which appears at first sight to be utterly irresponsible. The apocalyptic writers are trying, in their own fashion, to carry on the work of the prophets, and in at least one respect they mark a real advance. The prophets did not seek to explain God's judgments. They took their stand on the bare fact that since the will of God was sovereign all that opposed it would in the end be overthrown. The apocalypticists look to the final issue in order to understand God's purpose and to vindicate his dealings with men. Apocalyptic may be described as the Hebrew substitute for philosophy. The genius of the people was not metaphysical, but the problems which faced the Greek thinkers were equally urgent in Israel, and an effort was made to solve them. The apocalypticist set out, not from postulates of reason, but from data of revelation. He assumed the fact of God, of a heavenly world, of a divine government, of the coming victory of righteousness. He grasped these truths not in the abstract but imaginatively. Forces and ideas became personal agencies; processes of thought were understood as actual transactions in the realm of spirit. It may be granted that much in the apocalyptic books is crude and extravagant. Symbol is confounded with fact,

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permanent religious issues with ritual and tradition. The imagery is often artificial and the conclusions arbitrary and incoherent. Yet in itself apocalyptic is a legitimate mode of thought. Although it lacks the rational basis of philosophy it allows room for elements which are wanting in most philosophical systems. Instead of attempting to build up the world out of pure ideas it takes full account of moral purposes and of facts which are not to be explained by reason. It is unjust to class all philosophers as serious thinkers, grappling with real problems, and all apocalyptists as mere visionaries. This is what is done, as a matter of course, in most histories of thought. A philosophical system, even though it has been long exploded, is discussed solemnly as marking one of the stages of advance, while apocalyptic is never mentioned, or is treated with an indulgent smile, like a drawing by a child. The truth is that the apocalyptists were just as earnest in their thinking as the philosophers; for the most part they were far more so, since they were seeking light in grave practical difficulties. Their main ideas are possibly just as true as those of philosophy, and have certainly taken a much stronger hold on the minds of men. To this day the most powerful motives to action are supplied by those apocalyptic forecasts of a final judgment, a hereafter, a consummation towards which the whole life of the universe is striving. All speculation must needs be tentative, and when it tries to penetrate the last secrets it finds itself baffled. This is true of apocalyptic thinking, but it is no less true of philosophy. The only difference is that in the philosophical method there is a specious reasonableness,

while apocalyptic confessedly uses the language of symbol and imagery.

By its very name apocalyptic declares itself to be revelation, and this has proved a fruitful source of error. For one thing, a doubt has been cast on the whole idea of revelation, confused as it is with the fanciful machinery of those ancient books. We no longer believe that the heavens are opened, that angels appear in mid-air, that mysterious voices proclaim dark secrets and events in the far future. If this is revelation we naturally think of it as the delusion of disordered minds. But an injustice is also done to the books themselves when we regard them as in a literal sense "revelation." The imagery belongs for the most part only to the framework of their teaching, and often is nothing more than a conscious literary device. This is virtually admitted by the writers themselves. They compose their books invariably under an assumed name—that of Enoch, Moses, Baruch, Ezra or some other great figure of the past. This prophetic man, favoured with the confidence of God, is supposed to see visions and to record them in a book which is now opened. The procedure is hardly different from that of allegorical writers like Spenser and Bunyan when they make their characters pass through strange adventures in some indefinite time and country. By this we are given to understand that the story is not to be read literally; it deals with spiritual events, which take place in the human soul. The apocalypses are likewise, in large measure, to be understood as allegory. Their scene is in heaven, and

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the actors are angelic beings; but these visionary forms in which it is embodied do not constitute the revelation. The main interest of these writers is in spiritual ideas, similar for the most part to those of the prophets.

Between prophecy and apocalyptic there is, indeed, no real break. In later prophecy, for instance in Ezekiel, Isaiah 24-26, the two types of teaching are so interwoven that it is hardly possible to distinguish one from the other. At the same time there is one marked difference between them, and for our present purpose it is an essential one. The prophets are conscious that their message has come to them by immediate knowledge, and that it is absolutely valid. They deal with events of their own time and apply the divine word to particular needs, but the word itself is concerned with some abiding principle—that God is just and merciful, that he is working towards a great purpose, that behind the visible things there is a spiritual reality. These, in the full sense, are truths of revelation. They cannot be discovered or proved by man's reason, but are given to the prophet directly in his knowledge of God. The apocalyptists have not obtained their message in this immediate manner, but take up the prophetic message and reflect on it. On the ground of what was formerly revealed they build up a system of speculation. The prophets, for example, had proclaimed that God, in the end, will vindicate the righteous. This is a truth of revelation. There is no evidence in nature that the righteous are distinguished from the wicked, but the prophets have knowledge of a moral order which is above nature. In apocalyptic the truth revealed through the prophets is

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taken for granted, and is drawn out to its further issues. There will be a day of judgment when God will summon before him all souls of men and will weigh their actions according to his law, and will punish the wicked and call the just into eternal life. The picture is graphic and detailed; the seer appears to be gazing into a hidden world and reading its mysteries. Yet what he supplies is nothing but a filling out of the revelation. A truth has been given him and he throws it into realistic form so as to make it concrete and impressive. The same holds true of all the apocalyptic conceptions—the new age, the future life, the final consummation. It might seem in each case as if the conception itself hardly needed to be revealed. Any one, for instance, can hold the general belief in immortality; but how shall we learn something as to the conditions of the new life, the abodes of the blessed, the appearance they wear and the occupations they follow? Knowledge of this kind is hidden from us, and when some one professes to impart it we say that it has come to him by revelation. This, however, is a mistaken judgment. The revelation is given in the simple truth, that man belongs to a higher spiritual order in which hereafter he will find eternal life. Ever and again that truth has impressed itself on prophetic men with irresistible certainty, so that they know it has been given to them, directly from God. But the apocalyptists are not satisfied with the revealed truth. They wish to make it more explicit, and in the effort to do so they fall back on knowledge which is manifestly not revealed. They work up the data of tradition and mythology. They read

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new constructions into scripture texts. They allow free scope to their fancy and conjecture. Whatever may be the value of these new elements they have been contributed by the mind itself and owe nothing to revelation. Even granting that the writers have had an ecstatic vision (and this is sometimes more than probable), it is evident that all their imagery is derived from earthly experience. The splendours of the heavenly world are only the visible ones heightened; the joys are the perfection of those which we know in the present. No doubt the picture set before us is marvellous, but there is nothing in it that suggests an order outside of the material one. All that can properly be called revelation is the simple truth, taken over from the prophets, that in fellowship with God there is eternal life.

The work of the apocalyptists is, in fact, the same in character as that of the Rabbinical schools which flourished in the same period and from which, in all probability, most of the writers were drawn. The Rabbis expounded the ethical teaching of the Old Testament, defining the prophetic ideas and showing how each of them must be applied to the manifold contingencies of life. What had been given by direct revelation is elaborated into a moral code. In like manner the apocalyptists worked on the religious ideas, and built up an eschatology on the ground of a few great conceptions. No one would contend that the laboured prescriptions of the Rabbis were due to revelation; they did not themselves profess to be anything more than the expositors of what was written. The apocalyptists deal with the

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spiritual world, and their teaching inevitably carries with it an air of mystery. Yet it is the same in its aim and nature as the Rabbinical expositions. It does not impart any new truth, but amplifies and illustrates that which is known already. In so far as it conveys a revelation we must look for this, not in the visions themselves, which belong to the imaginative setting, but in the purely religious convictions which lie behind them.

In one respect, however, apocalyptic has a real place in the history of revelation. For the first time, in this type of thought, a clear emphasis was laid on the future. The prophets were concerned with coming events, but their interest was in the divine purpose as it was fulfilling itself in the present. They looked to the future only for a confirmation, apparent to all eyes, of principles which they saw at work already, and their message would lose nothing essential although the element of prediction were left out altogether. In the later period, however, this element becomes cardinal, so much so that the apocalypticists conceive it to be their specific task to throw light on the future. This was due, in large measure, to a weakening of the religious impulse. The prophets were certain that their message was from God, while the later teachers felt their need for some outward assurance, and looked for it in the future since it was wanting in the present. But the change was also due to the altered conditions in the life of the nation. Israel, in the age of the prophets, was working out its own destiny, and could regard itself as actively co-operating with God in his pur-

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pose for the world. In the later age, Israel was a subject people, and the general mood was one of passive resignation. Amidst the present evils men could only sustain themselves with the hope of some better day which would dawn hereafter. As time went on this hope receded ever farther into the distance, and at last was severed completely from all earthly prospects. It was believed that the present order must be destroyed and give place to another in which God would reign.

Apocalyptic is founded on this conception of the two ages. It assumes that during the term of earthly history God has remained in the shadow, and has permitted inferior powers to have their way with the world. A day is coming when this dominion of evil will disappear. God will put forth his hand and assert his sovereignty and will establish all things on a new basis. His servants are to bear with patience until the existing order has run its course, and even now it is visibly in its last decrepitude. The time is short, and the servant of God must forget the present and look confidently for the great future. This, in brief, is the message of apocalyptic. Its aim is to withdraw men from the world around them, in which God is hidden, and lift their minds to the coming age when he will reveal himself.

In apocalyptic, therefore, the idea of revelation is inseparably linked with that of a future in which God will be manifest and will fulfil his purpose. It might fairly be objected that in this way the idea becomes half meaningless. For the prophets and psalmists revelation is a fact of the present. They believe in a higher order of

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which they have glimpses even now in their own experience and in the life of their nation. They look out on the world of nature and see a glory—a reflection of the divine presence. Religion must consist always in this apprehension of God here and now, in spite of the earthly barrier. But in apocalyptic this vision of God is thrown forward into an indefinite future. It is believed that some day, when all conditions have become different, God will manifest himself to men, but they cannot expect to know him or draw near to him in this present age.

The future emphasis thus obscured and almost cancelled the idea of revelation; and yet in several respects it prepared the way for that larger conception which meets us in the New Testament. For one thing, it strengthened the conviction that there is something beyond the range of human knowledge. The world around us is indeed mysterious, but it is open before our eyes. There seems to be always the possibility that at last, with better means of discovery, we shall be able to pierce its secrets. The confidence will never die out that man will in the end know everything, by the masterful effort of his own mind. Yet there is one domain in which the mind is compelled to admit its helplessness. Whatever mysteries it may force open, here is a closed door. From the beginning of time it has been man's chief curiosity to know what will happen in the future, and there have been arts innumerable which have pretended to answer this desire. But the future cannot be known. We look to science for the solution of all our problems, but it is

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science itself which has finally ruled out those vain endeavours to know the future. It refuses even to consider them, since the future, by the very nature of things, lies outside the compass of knowledge. What is now we may discover, but what shall be depends on incalculable factors to which no mathematics, no linking of cause with effect, will ever provide the key. So the future stands, in unique and unmistakeable fashion, for the unknowable. Man can weigh and measure the fixed stars, but he asks "what will happen to myself tomorrow?" That simple question at once reminds him of the eternal limits of his faculties. He feels that he is surrounded still, as he was at first, with a world of mystery.

But while we cannot know the future we can affirm this much about it—that the moral laws which are acting in the present will continue to operate. How they will assert themselves we cannot tell, but we are certain that there is a moral order which may apparently fail for the moment but cannot in the end be defeated. The prophets, as we have seen, took their stand on this ground. When they foretold the future it was not in virtue of some second-sight or consultation of omens, but in reliance on moral laws, as sure in their working as those which keep the planets in their spheres. It was the greatness of the prophets that they did not require to look to the future for a confirmation of those laws. They discerned them in the present, in spite of all evil and injustice, and knew that they would stand forever. The apocalyptists could not rise to this faith of the prophets. Amidst the calamities of their time they could not trace the hand of God,

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but none the less they believed in a moral order which could not be frustrated. To maintain their assurance of it they threw their minds into the future. Although God seemed to have withdrawn himself they looked to that coming day when he was certain to establish his will.

Once more, the future involves the idea of consummation. The world as we see it is manifestly in process of becoming. All that we perceive is the movement of the shuttle, and we know nothing of the web which will finally emerge from it. Often there may seem to be no pattern in the weaver's mind, but it is impossible to judge his work when it is still half done. So we project ourselves into the future in order to see it in its completeness. Only when we so try to envisage it can we make any guess as to the purpose which governs the never-ceasing process. The idea of revelation is thus inseparable from that of the future. God's will is concealed from us, but we believe that it is moving towards an end, and if that end were known everything would explain itself. It was with this conviction that the apocalyptists fixed their minds on the future. They were not trying to satisfy an idle curiosity, or to drown their sense of the evil present in dreams of a better day. What they sought for was a revelation of God's purpose, and they found it in those visions of the coming time when all the change and confusion would give place to the consummation. It was thus a great step forward when apocalyptic brought into the centre of religion the idea of futurity. The weakness of religion has commonly been that it anchored itself in a past, real or imaginary. It has set out from the assump-

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tion that in ancient time God was nearer to the earth than now and that men were then more capable of knowing him. In later Judaism the prophetic spirit was smothered by the weight of tradition, and in the apocalyptic movement we can trace a real effort towards liberty. Faith in God was now associated not merely with a great past, but with a still greater time that would yet be. It is not a little significant that in apocalyptic writings the glory of God becomes almost another name for the coming age. These teachers are assured that until now God has never truly manifested himself. All knowledge of him has been preliminary and fragmentary. Men are to look forward to a new age fast approaching, when all the world will see the glory of God. It was no accident that apocalyptic had its direct outcome in Christianity. With all that was empty and fanciful in its speculations it had brought to light a great religious conception, which was finally summed up in the message "The Kingdom of God is at hand."

With apocalyptic, then, the thought of the future became a vital factor in religion. This future, however—and it was here that the movement made shipwreck—was entirely separated from the present. Men were made to feel not merely that in the future they would know God, but that no knowledge was possible until the future. They must be content for the time being to live in a world from which God had hidden himself, although some day, in a manner which would far surpass their utmost hope, he would be revealed. The prophetic faith in a

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God now working was absent from this apocalyptic religion. Everything was sacrificed to the promise of a glorious future.

Perhaps it was for this reason that on Judaism itself the apocalyptic movement had only a temporary and superficial influence. It had nothing to offer in the way of definite guidance. It fostered a visionary frame of mind which was out of keeping with the practical discipline of the Law. For good or evil the Jewish teachers at last rejected apocalyptic, and their instinct was no doubt a sound one. They felt that if Judaism was to maintain itself as the religion of the Law it must hold aloof from vain speculation. In Christianity, however, the new ideas took a deep and enduring root. There is no reason to suppose that Jesus had read the apocalyptic books—much less that he belonged to some esoteric circle, devoted to their teaching. He shows no detailed knowledge of apocalyptic, and confines himself to those broad aspects of it which had become familiar to every one. He concentrates, indeed, on the one idea—that the new age is at hand, when God will bring in the Kingdom. But while he looks forward, like the apocalyptists, to the coming glory, he is convinced that God is already active. In the light of the future Kingdom he sees God in the present, and calls on men to trust him, and to find life in obedience to his will. He thus breaks radically with the apocalyptic type of religion; but it would be more just to say that he grasps the truth towards which the apocalyptic thinkers were struggling and which they failed to reach. They were assured of a higher world of reality, but put it

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somewhere among the clouds, in an imaginary future. Their hope for the Kingdom of God was nothing but a beggar's dream of infinite riches. With Jesus it became a living power. In the knowledge of what God would do men learned to understand what he was now doing. The future reality made the present itself more real.

The effect of true revelation must always be to relate the divine order to the present. Something is disclosed which is apart from the visible world and yet explains it—giving worth and significance to man's actual life. This is the nature of the Old Testament revelations, even when they seem most visionary. One thinks of the burning bush, of the horses and chariots of fire around Elijah, of Isaiah beholding God in the heavenly Temple. In apocalyptic thought there is no such suggestion of a divine power which is outside of the present and yet gives it meaning and purpose and grandeur. All emphasis is thrown on the one idea that although God is now hidden he will manifest himself in the future. In this hope there was doubtless a religious value. Old Testament thought, even on its higher levels, was limited to ideals and aspirations which belonged essentially to this life. It was apocalyptic, with its exclusive vision of the future, which enabled men to realise, as never before, a heavenly order that stood over against the earthly. But in Christianity this higher order ceases to be remote and unreal. It becomes the goal of all effort, the triumphant answer to all difficulties. "We look not to that which is seen but to that which is unseen; for our light affliction which is but for a moment worketh in us a far more ex-

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ceeding and eternal weight of glory.”² In these words of Paul we have the difference between the Christian attitude and that of apocalyptic. The thought of the future glory has become at the same time a conviction of the present reality of God. Apocalyptic is now, in the true sense, revelation.

² II Cor. 4:17.

CHAPTER IV

JESUS AS THE REVEALER

It is the Christian belief that God was revealed to men in all his fulness through Jesus Christ; but from the actual records we seem to learn little of this revelation. The teaching of Jesus, as we know it from the Synoptic Gospels, is concerned for the most part with moral and social duties. The sayings are indeed profound and beautiful, and we can assent to the judgment expressed in Jesus' lifetime, "never man spoke as this man." But there is hardly anything that appears to throw new light on the mysteries of the unseen world. It is not surprising that many of the most devout of Jesus' followers have found more to satisfy them in the Fourth Gospel, which is not historical in the same sense as the other three. Here the atmosphere is spiritual. A message is delivered which bears directly on the invisible things and the inward communion with God.

In view of the discrepancy between the recorded teaching and the later beliefs it has often been maintained that Jesus himself had only a passive part in what we call the Christian revelation. The message proclaimed by the Apostles was attached to his name, but his own task was simply to affirm, more clearly and forcibly than in

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contemporary Judaism, the great truths which had been set forth by the prophets. In natural course he would have been remembered, if at all, as one of the teachers who developed the traditional religion on its ethical side. He would have taken his place with the authors of Ecclesiasticus and the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs. In so far as he differed from them it was in his combination of ethical teaching with the apocalyptic idea of the Kingdom of God. But the great catastrophe of his life made an overwhelming impression on the minds of his followers. He stood out in their memory as the ideal Servant of God. He was acclaimed not merely as chief of the prophets but as the expected Messiah, and all the Messianic attributes were transferred to him. When the message was eventually carried to the Gentile world it was explained in the light of those mystical and philosophical conceptions which were current among the mingled races of the Roman empire. Jesus became the central figure of a cult. His own teaching fell into the background and was replaced by a theological doctrine, woven around his Person and his death on the Cross. It was this doctrine which was accepted by the Christian church as the revelation given by Christ.

Now in this reading of the history there are elements of truth, which will need to be considered in due course. It cannot be denied that almost from the outset the main emphasis was thrown, not on the teaching of Jesus but on his Person. He was worshipped as himself the revelation. By the mere fact of his appearance in the world and by his accomplishment of the destiny laid on him,

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he had made God known. This was indeed the later interpretation. We have to ask whether it can be reconciled with the historical facts of his mission.

From the record preserved to us in the Gospels we can make out the chief elements of his teaching, in spite of all later additions and modifications. It must always be remembered, for that part, that even sayings which may not be literally authentic have a real value as evidence, since they would not have been assigned to Jesus if they had not been in harmony with his own ideas. In the biography of every great man there are anecdotes which are historically doubtful, although they are often the most characteristic. They came to be attached to this particular man because they fitted him. It was felt by every one who knew his mind that if he had been placed in those circumstances he would have thought and spoken in just that way.

It has often been objected that we know too little about Jesus to form any true conception of the nature of his message. After criticism has been rigorously applied we are left with only a few bare facts, a meagre handful of sayings. But it is a strange confusion which would measure the value of the teaching by the mere bulk of the record which has come down to us. It is all the stranger since the matter in question is one of revelation. If Jesus had set himself to expound some philosophical or scientific theory there might be ground for objecting that we cannot judge it from such scanty information as we possess. It would be necessary to know the arguments

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by which it was supported, the facts and observations which had suggested it. But revelation depends on vision. It has nothing to do with reasonings and evidences. A single word may be like a flash of lightning which illuminates a new world. Is it not true, indeed, that all the great discoveries have had their germ in some thought which has come in a moment through sudden inspiration? Perhaps the development of it has been the work of a lifetime, and whole libraries have afterwards been written to confirm or explain it. But the essential discovery can be summed up in a sentence or a single word; for those who see the import, everything is there. So it does not matter how much or little we know of Jesus' teaching. If our short records of it had run to large volumes we should have been no wiser. If criticism were to reduce the record to only a few brief sayings there would still be enough to afford a foundation to the Christian faith. The Lord's Prayer, for example, consists of half a dozen short petitions, and may be recited from end to end in less than a minute. Yet we need hardly go beyond that prayer to discover the whole mind of Jesus. Not only do the Gospel sayings express thoughts of infinite vitality, but they are still more valuable for that which lies behind the thoughts. They give us an insight into the motives which Jesus lived by, into his moral temper and his attitude to God and man. The teaching itself is nothing but an overflow. When Paul spoke of "the unsearchable riches of Christ" he was not thinking of some body of truth, conveyed in words. He had in mind that new knowledge of God which was in Jesus

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and which was only suggested in what he taught. It is there that we must look for the revelation.

Jesus himself may not have been fully conscious of the purport of his message. Probably it is true of all great men that they do not understand their own work in all its compass, and the larger the work the less do they comprehend it. We call them "demonic" men. We feel that they were impelled by an unknown power, that they were instruments of historical or intellectual forces which they could not measure. It may not be until ages afterwards that their work, in all its meaning, becomes intelligible. That this was so with Jesus we can hardly doubt. There is no evidence that he thought of himself as founding a new religion, intended not only for the Jewish people but for all mankind. He seems himself to have been bewildered by the necessity of the Cross. Throughout his life he had accepted the will of God, wherever it might lead him, and he died in that spirit, although the meaning of his death was dark to him. Paul and the Fourth Evangelist could see a divine purpose in it of which he was himself unconscious, but this does not imply that they gave it a significance which it did not possess. It was the very greatness of Jesus that his message was infinitely larger and deeper than he knew. We have hardly begun to appreciate its whole meaning, through the experiences of two thousand years. No interpretation of it can be adequate which is based on ideas that were definitely present to his own mind.

At the same time it is wrong to think of Jesus as merely an unconscious medium of the truths he uttered. In our

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own time he is sometimes described as a "religious genius," but a phrase of this kind is foolish and misleading. For one thing, it suggests that religious insight is due to a specific faculty, which in some men is abnormally developed, like the sense of colour in a painter. Knowledge of God, however, as the Old Testament writers perceived, is an act of the whole man—a moral much more than an intellectual knowledge. Moreover, the phrase simply repeats, in a more modern form, the old error of mechanical inspiration. As the prophets were formerly regarded as passive vehicles, through which the word of the Spirit was conveyed, so we would now credit them with a "genius," working unconsciously. This was certainly not the nature of Jesus' insight. He may not have realised the full issue of his message, but it could not have come to him if he had received it blindly. He had subdued himself to the will of God, and had thus learned that it was the highest good. When he spoke of forgiveness and self-sacrifice he knew by a life-long practice what they were. The very power of his message consists in this—that it was so entirely one with his own choice, his own personality. If he had proclaimed great truths with which his own action was inconsistent we might well have recognised that some force apart from himself had for the moment possessed him, but we should have felt at the same time that his words were empty and unreal. But we are conscious as we listen to him that his knowledge is inseparable from himself. It has come to him out of the very heart of his own struggle and experience, and is all of a piece with his life and death.

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This is what gives it the quality of revelation. We receive from him not merely a message about God but an apprehension of God himself.

The more we examine Jesus' teaching the more we see that what is distinctive in it is nothing else than this full awareness of truths which in themselves were often old and familiar. Modern investigation has gone deeply into the sources of the various sayings. It has shown that for most of them some analogy can be found in the prophetic or Rabbinical literature. It has explored the sacred books of all religions, and has brought to light innumerable maxims which correspond in some degree with those of Jesus. How, then, did he differ from those other teachers? What did he contribute that we should think of him as in some unique sense a revealer? The answer is that he grasped as realities what had hitherto been theories or surmises. Many, for example, had addressed God as Father, but no one before him had absolutely believed in God's love and providence. Many had declared that it was the spiritual interests that mattered; he was the first who dared to renounce all else and to stake his life upon them. It was this that made the originality of Jesus. Between him and those earlier teachers who seem to have anticipated him there was the same kind of difference as between Columbus, who set foot on the new world, and the old geographers who guessed that it might be there.

Jesus, therefore, was not the unconscious agent of a divine message. He knew that he had been called by

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God; he felt, to the depths of his soul, the truth and value of the things he taught. If we can believe the anecdote preserved by Luke he had awakened in boyhood to a clear sense of his mission. His confidence in it never wavered. All through his teaching we can trace the note of authority which lies behind his words and gives them force and meaning. He performed miracles, in the sure conviction that he could act in the name of God. Above all, he was assured that God had chosen him to be Messiah. It can be gathered from a close study of Mark's narrative that this belief dawned on him gradually during the later part of his ministry, and was never openly avowed except within the circle of his disciples. The conviction sprang, however, out of a deep and abiding sense of nearness to God; and this was its real significance. Too much importance has commonly been attached to the mere title "Messiah." It has been assumed that if we only knew more about the history of this term and its exact meaning in contemporary Judaism, we should have the key to the inward mind of Jesus and the purpose of his work. It matters little, however, that Jesus described himself by this particular title. He used it because of the historical accident that he was born a Jew and employed the forms available to him in Jewish thought and tradition. If he had belonged to another age and country he would have called himself by some other name, which would have meant essentially the same thing. For that part, the church had not been in existence for a generation when it began to replace the Messianic idea with others, which were felt to be more expressive of the true

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mind of Jesus. From the outset he had known himself to be in direct fellowship with God and entrusted with a divine commission. It was this consciousness that he had been chosen out of the race of men as the revealer which came at last to clear expression in his claim to be Messiah.

It has been argued that this claim of Jesus was due to a delusion, similar to that which has taken possession of other religious enthusiasts. Wrapped up in one idea they are convinced that it has come from God, and that he has himself appointed them to carry it into effect. A criticism of this kind was urged in the first century by Celsus, and analogies have frequently been drawn between the claim of Jesus and that of Mohammed and of the founders of various peculiar sects. They also professed, and apparently never doubted, that they were set apart by God to some kind of Messianic office. Can we take for granted, however, that they suffered from a delusion? We judge them by our common standards of what is sane and rational, but may there not be modes of experience which are inconceivable to the normal mind? The fact that there are partial analogies to the life of Jesus has, indeed, a quite opposite significance to that which is often given to it. If his sense of divine appointment had been altogether solitary we might fairly regard it with misgiving; but there have been those other instances of men who knew themselves to be the chosen instruments of God. No end can be served by denying that their experience was the same in kind as that of Jesus, and they must be taken into account along with him. When some event or

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phenomenon which is thought to be quite imaginary has been repeated, we must confess it to be a fact. When one man's consciousness that he is called by God is shared, in some degree, by others, we can believe that it answered to something real. God does, at times, appoint some chosen servant through whom he manifests himself to the world.

At the same time the Messianic consciousness of Jesus was plainly, in several respects, unique. (1) For one thing, in his apprehension of God there was a clearness and intensity to which we can find no parallel. The Fourth Evangelist can truly say, "the Spirit was given to him without measure."¹ This is apparent from the sureness and simplicity and never-failing insight of his religious teaching. To other prophets the higher knowledge has come spasmodically. Paul was blinded by the heavenly vision. He tells us himself that after each of his rapturous experiences there came a reaction, in which he was stricken to the ground.² In all ages inspiration has been associated with this sense of a convulsion; but as we read the words of Jesus we are impressed above all else with the tranquillity and steadfastness of his religious mood. He gazes on the sun with naked eye. The higher world is to him the normal one, and he moves in it without effort or excitement. This indeed is the reason of that disappointment which many have felt with his teaching. It all appears so transparent, and is delivered so quietly and naturally that we can hardly think of it as inspired. There are no sudden gusts, but an atmosphere so calm

¹John 3:34.

²II Cor. 12:7.

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and unvarying that we are not conscious of breathing it.

(2) In Jesus' knowledge of God there is also a quality which we do not find in any other. Many, in all ages, had clearly heard God's voice; the prophets of Israel had known that he was just and beneficent and was working towards a great purpose. But nowhere can we find the depth of perception which was habitual with Jesus. Not only is he conscious of God but he seems to know him in his inner nature and can discern the purpose which he is bringing to fulfilment. When we speak of the Christian revelation we think of something clear and specific. It does not consist merely in those general truths about God which find their place in all the higher religions. In Christianity we have a conception of God which was peculiar to Jesus, and cannot be mistaken for any other. It is indeed true that the church is broken into countless sects and parties, each of them claiming that the message of Jesus is embodied in its own particular creed. Amidst the confusion of doctrine it might often seem well-nigh impossible to determine what Jesus himself intended. The feeling comes at times to many Christian men that they stand nearer to some alien religion than to certain interpretations of their own. Yet it is not too much to say that between any type of Christianity and even the loftiest of all other faiths there is a world of difference. Christians may be at variance in their doctrines and their institutions and their modes of worship, but they all agree in an attitude of mind which is distinctively Christian. It may express itself in various forms, conflicting with each other, but the Romanist, the Quaker, the radi-

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cal theologian and the most conservative—they all know alike when an action is Christian, when a judgment or sentiment is in keeping with the mind of Christ. What the difference consists in it would often be hard to say, but in the spiritual perception of Jesus there was something that distinguished it from that of all other teachers, and which can at once be recognised though it cannot be defined. Before and after him there have been prophets whose knowledge, in its own degree, has been just as authentic. None the less it can be said of him that he alone has attained to the true vision of God.

His message is many-sided but it all centres on one theme. He took up the apocalyptic belief that the present age had all but run its course, and would be succeeded by the new age, in which God would destroy all usurping powers and reign. All that he says has reference to this coming Kingdom of God—the conditions of entering it, the law that will prevail in it, the type of character it requires, the nature of God as he will then be known.

In itself this conception of the Kingdom was by no means original with Jesus. It can be traced back through the whole history of Hebrew thought, almost to the beginnings, and is associated with the belief that God will rescue and exalt his people Israel. As yet he is only known to Israel, but a time will come when he will reign through his people over the whole earth. In apocalyptic thought this national hope merges in a larger one, which had always been involved in it. The deliverance of Israel becomes only an episode in a general transformation

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which will embrace the world of nature as well as human society. Thus as Jesus received it the conception of the Kingdom was a highly complex one in which all sorts of elements were mingled—national, mythological, religious. It had been built up by a long succession of thinkers, through more than a thousand years of history. Yet behind this process of thought and tradition there was a truth of revelation. At the heart of the religion of Israel lay the conviction that God had a purpose in his creation and government of the world. This assurance, which had impressed itself on the prophets with overwhelming force, had come through an immediate knowledge of God. It was combined with the national hope, and with mythical ideas of a golden age in which the world would be restored to its pristine harmony and splendour. But intrinsically it had nothing to do with these forms under which it had been elaborated. Behind the thought of the Kingdom there was a revelation, and this was its vital element.

This must never be forgotten in our judgment of the apocalyptic conception, on which Jesus directly based his teaching. We have here to do with a complicated mythology, which obscures the main idea and makes it appear entirely fanciful and artificial. Since this was the foundation he built on we cannot but ask whether the hope of Jesus was anything more than a delusion. It was assumed, for one thing, that the Kingdom would come through a tremendous crisis, which was to overtake the world at some future date, already calculable. The old order would perish in one great cataclysm, a Judgment

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would be held on all nations; the servants of God would be set apart for eternal life in a renovated earth. It was assumed, too, that the heirs of the Kingdom would be the people of Israel, and if aliens should have any part in it they must rely on the mediation of Israel. Even when the Kingdom was regarded as of heavenly nature, room was allowed for a preliminary earthly Kingdom in which Israel would occupy the first place. Once more, the future age was invested with every circumstance of visible splendour. Sun and moon would shine ten times more brightly, nature would be infinitely more lovely and fertile, all pain and trouble would disappear. Sometimes the prophetic hope of a reign of righteousness seems almost to fall out of sight, and the whole effort is to picture in the most gorgeous colours the glory and perfection of the new world that will arise. In apocalyptic, therefore, we have a mingling of ideas, derived from many different sources, and for the writers themselves all this is of the first importance. Yet it belongs to the mode of presentation. The essential conception is that of a higher order of being in which the divine order is fulfilled. Paul quotes from a lost apocalypse a great saying which has ever since been accepted as an expression of Christian faith: "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for those who love him."³ This belief in a higher world which is not to be apprehended by sense or thought is the ultimate motive of apocalyptic. All the rest is the imaginative setting for this one truth.

³ I Cor. 2:9.

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On the deeper view, therefore, Jesus did not borrow from the apocalyptic thinkers. He took up that truth of revelation which was the vital element in their teaching, and which had been revealed to himself, as to all true prophets of God. At the same time he made use of the apocalyptic forms in which the truth had become current. Every period has its particular mode of conceiving the higher reality. On one side of their mind men happen, for that given time, to be religiously susceptible, and the teacher who would drive home his message must try to touch them on that side. Thus in the early centuries the prevailing mood was metaphysical, in the Middle Ages sacramental, in our own time social and idealistic. In the time of Jesus the apocalyptic hopes had taken a peculiar hold on the minds of the Jewish people. This is evident from the response given to John the Baptist and from the questions which were constantly addressed to Jesus. If he was to make his meaning intelligible he had to express it in the accepted terms of thought.

That he shared himself in the common outlook there is no reason to doubt. The apocalyptic ideas may seem to our minds fantastic, as our own ideas will no doubt seem to the men of a few centuries hence. Yet they afforded a quite possible solution of the riddle of the world, and behind them, as we have seen, there was one belief which was no mere product of man's imagination. The spiritual order, the Kingdom of God, was for Jesus the most certain of all facts, and he found at least the suggestion of it in the apocalyptic dreams. It is clear, however, that

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Jesus was no mere apocalyptist. While he accepts the common hopes he always keeps them secondary. Again and again when he is asked some question which in the apocalyptic books is all-important, he refuses to answer, or says in effect that it does not matter. We cannot definitely tell from his teaching whether he thought of the Kingdom as present or future, suddenly manifested or growing like a seed, an outward fact or a spiritual condition. In view of such inconsistencies it has been held that he vacillated in his idea of the Kingdom, or that he had never thought it out or knew exactly what he meant. The simpler explanation is that he had little interest in apocalyptic for its own sake. He accepts it as presenting in vivid and concrete form his belief in the Kingdom, but he has not arrived at that belief by study of writings and traditions. He is not concerned with apocalyptic problems but with the vision of the Kingdom as it has come to himself.

There can be no doubt that he came forward as a teacher under an irresistible impulse to proclaim something that was entirely new. He was himself fully conscious of this newness of his message, and declared that it must be set free from all ancient forms. It was like new wine which would burst old bottles, like a piece of new cloth which would only rend an old garment.⁴ We know that this new quality in the message was apparent to those who heard it. They could not reconcile it to what they believed already, and were roused either to burning enthusiasm or to the most deadly opposition. What was

⁴ Mark 2:22.

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this new element in the teaching? It cannot have been merely the announcement of the Kingdom. To us the apocalyptic ideas appear strange, and we are apt to assume that those who listened to Jesus were startled by them. But in his own time they were generally familiar, and it was for this very reason that he employed them. They served as a common language by which he and the people could understand each other, and by means of them he was able to communicate something which, in itself, was absolutely new.

All attempts to formulate Jesus' conception of the Kingdom are in their nature futile. He himself never tried to define it. He was always trying, by symbol and parable, to convey some knowledge of what he meant by the Kingdom, but he could only say what it was like, not what it actually was. This was not because he was in any way vague and uncertain in his own mind. The Kingdom was to him the one clear reality, in the light of which he understood all other things. Yet his thought of it was like the impression left on the memory by some wonderful scene. It is distinct and unforgettable, and is the measure by which you judge everything that is grand and lovely, but you cannot impart your own knowledge of it to others. Your description of it will at best be only a catalogue of colours and forms and dimensions, which will convey nothing to those who have not seen. So the Kingdom had been revealed to Jesus. He did not have before him a theological conception which could be expounded in words, but a vision which had come to him from God.

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This much, however, is clear—that while he made use of the apocalyptic language his thought of the Kingdom was different from that of the apocalyptists. For one thing, he allows the idea of futurity to fall into the background. He indeed thinks of God as directing all things towards a purpose, which will find its consummation in the Kingdom. In many sayings he appears to accept the current belief that a great crisis must intervene before God will assert his will. Yet he breaks quite away from the apocalyptic belief that in the present age God has withdrawn from the world. His whole teaching turns on the conviction that God is reigning now, watching over his people and bringing his will to pass, in spite of all efforts of men and demons to frustrate it. This knowledge of God's present activity is the motive of that invincible trust in God which sustained him in his own life and death. It is not too much to say that with Jesus the idea of futurity, which was cardinal in apocalyptic, resolves itself into a kind of symbol. The Kingdom is not yet manifest. Living under earthly conditions men are ignorant of that higher order in which God rules. They will not realise it until the veil is torn apart in a great coming crisis. But it is not the crisis which will produce the Kingdom. For Jesus it exists already, and has always existed. He lives in the faith of it and seeks to communicate to others his own assurance that over them is that world of God which gives meaning to this passing world. So he speaks of the Kingdom in the language of futurity, but by this he means only that it is the spiritual order. Before they can discern it men must reach beyond the visible.

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Again, the merely national idea of the Kingdom falls away. It does not appear that Jesus reasoned himself, as Paul was to do afterwards, out of Jewish prejudices and limitations. So far as we can see he gave no specific thought to the destiny of the Gentiles. Born a Jew he accepted the Jewish belief that Israel was God's people, and that the Law was eternally binding. In a theoretical sense Jesus was far more national than Paul. But the tradition from which he did not consciously free himself never hampered him in his outlook. Into his teaching on the Kingdom he brought none of the cramping national ideas, but assumed as a matter of course that all who do God's will are God's children, and have complied with the one condition on which men may enter the Kingdom. Nothing is more remarkable than the difference here between Jesus and Paul. Although he was the Apostle to the Gentiles Paul remained a Jew to the end. Although he fought against the Law he never escaped from it, and continued to regard it as a divine imperative with which faith must reckon. Jesus, who lived under the Law and never called its right in question, is yet free, and is able to state his message as if the Law did not exist. The reason is that he takes his stand on purely religious perceptions. Paul has come to his position by way of reason. He argues that since God is one he must be God both of Jews and Gentiles; that faith, by its nature, must exclude the works of the Law. He examines the effect of the Law historically and psychologically, and shows that it has proved inadequate. The weight of this reasoning cannot be denied, but arguments can always be met by

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counter-arguments. Conclusions drawn from them have to be qualified, so as to make room for truth on the other side. Paul, therefore, is never quite able to detach himself from the national attitude. However fiercely he opposes Judaism he seeks to compromise with it. Jesus, on the other hand, had not convinced himself by logic, and was not encumbered by it. He simply perceived, as a fact of immediate religious knowledge, that God cares for all men, that he judges according to moral standards, that he forgives men and accepts them on the sole ground of repentance. When God was thus understood it was not necessary even to mention the old national assumptions. Although he formally took them over, as part of the inheritance into which he was born, Jesus was inwardly free from them.

Once more, and this was the vital change in Jesus' conception of the Kingdom, he thought of it on its inward side. He has almost nothing to say of that visible transformation which fills the whole horizon of the apocalyptic writers when they look to the coming age. Certainly he is awake, as they never were, to the glory of God which will be revealed; but he does not conceive of it in terms of dazzling lights, troops of angels, magnificence that surpasses all imagination. The glory will be spiritual. God will be known as Father, and all men will obey his will spontaneously as the law of their own being. The divine goodness will be manifest everywhere, and sin and wrong will disappear. Behind all the teaching of Jesus there is the conception of God as the just and loving will. The reign of God and the glory of it will thus consist in

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the subjugation of all things to that will of God. Jesus does not deny the apocalyptic picture. He assumes that the new age will be one of splendour, that God will reign in the midst of his angels, that men will themselves share in the nature of angels and enjoy eternal life under blessed conditions. But all this is left in the background. The one essential fact of the Kingdom is that the will of God will be done on earth as it is in heaven. In so far as they do the will of God, men already belong to the Kingdom. Though it is still to come they may possess, in the life of perfect obedience, all that gives meaning to the reign of God. It is here that we find the distinctive note in the teaching of Jesus. He changed the conception of the divine, associating it not with power, splendour, majesty, but with a holy will. By this he revolutionised the whole import of religion.

At this point, however, it is necessary to lay emphasis on one aspect of Jesus' message, apart from which it loses its significance. It is true that he thought of the Kingdom ethically. He declared that it would reach fulfilment in the victory of love and righteousness, and that men attain to God in so far as they do his will. The Kingdom of God, as Jesus knew it, may seem to be hardly distinguishable from the moral ideal. It has therefore been inferred that the moral interest was with him the primary, and in the last resort the only one. He was the teacher of a lofty ethic, social and individual, and since he was born into a highly religious race and time, he threw this ethic into a religious mould. The religion, however, was

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not essential. All that is valuable can easily be detached from the religious hypothesis, and even from the belief in God. It has been the effort of many thinkers in our own generation to liberate those moral ideas, in which they find the true substance of Jesus' teaching, from their entanglement with religious faith.

Now it must be granted that Jesus is an ethical teacher. His sayings, for much the greater part, are concerned with moral and social duties. It is one of his chief complaints against the scribes and Pharisees that they make more of pious observances than of those acts of justice and human kindness which constitute the real service of God. His manifesto of the Kingdom in the Sermon on the Mount consists almost wholly of an exposition of the new righteousness. Nevertheless it is plain, when we pierce even a little way beneath the surface, that the one interest of Jesus is religious. He regards the moral demands as binding because they are rooted in the will of God. He defines the grand motive of obedience as summed up in this—"that ye may be children of your Father who is in heaven."⁵ We are to do God's will that we may have fellowship with God and reproduce in ourselves the divine life. The aim of Jesus, in fact, is just the opposite to that which is sometimes attributed to him by modern liberalism. Instead of changing religion into an ethic, he insists that the whole purpose of ethic is religious. He does not say "God is ultimately one with the moral law." His message is always, "By obeying the moral law you know God; it is not an end in itself but

⁵ Matt. 5:45.

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the means by which you can attain to God." Often it has been objected to Jesus' teaching that he dwells so much on the reward which is attached to goodness. While declaring that men should serve God without thought of earthly recompense he yet adds, "great is your reward in heaven." This ethic is condemned as other-worldly, and Christian apologists have laboured to show that when he spoke of reward he used figurative language, or only adapted himself to popular modes of thought. But the idea of reward must be taken seriously, and without it we miss an all-important element in Jesus' message. It was never in his mind to inculcate virtue for virtue's sake. Such a doctrine is barren at the best, and is the negation of all that Jesus most fervently believed. He thought of goodness as the condition of all blessings. So far from ending with itself it is infinitely fruitful. It can be counted on, even when it seems void of result, to issue at last in some inestimable harvest. This confidence in the reward of right action was bound up inseparably for Jesus with his faith in God. Not only so, but it forms an essential and indeed the central element in his conception of goodness itself. What is it that makes an action right? This is the question that has perplexed all moralists, and to which they have offered a great variety of answers. The answer of Jesus is always explicit. A right action is one that is in accordance with the will of God, and it has value in so far as the motive in doing it is to fulfil God's will. This is the idea that runs all through the Sermon on the Mount. It is shown that actions right in themselves become worthless when they are performed

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with some other motive than that of obedience to God, who sees in secret. By obeying him we attain to fellowship with God, and this is the reward and purpose of the moral life.

Here, then, is the difference between the gospel of Jesus and the social or ethical gospels which are sometimes put forward as its substitute. In these other systems the idea of God is left out or made secondary. The moral law is identified with the largest good of society, or with the full development of personality, or with the perfect adjustment of man to the universe. With Jesus the emphasis is always on the one fact that the moral law is divine; by means of it God expresses his will, so that by fulfilling it man can lay hold of God. A recent critic⁶ has argued that the morality of Jesus, so far from being the highest the world has known, is not a morality at all. Jesus, he affirms, was interested solely in the transcendental Kingdom of God. He did not attempt to teach how life should be lived in this world, for he was opposed to this world, and placed man's task and goal outside of it. Our so-called Christian ethic is a compromise which Jesus himself would not have acknowledged, but which has saved a few fragments out of the shipwreck of his ideal. Now this judgment is obviously inadequate. It is the nature of all ideals, indeed it is the very thing which makes them ideals, that they cannot be fully attained. We cannot say that they are "shipwrecked" when they prove to lie beyond us, and can only be achieved imper-

⁶ Guignebert: *Jésus*, 473, 665.

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fectly in the stubborn material of man's life. Nevertheless, the critic has touched on a very real aspect of Jesus' teaching, which has been too often overlooked in our common interpretations of it. The primary interest of Jesus was not in morality but in that higher order which he called the Kingdom of God. It was this that was always in his mind when he laid down the principles which were to guide his followers in the conduct of their daily life. They were to see in the moral law the expression of the will of God; they were to obey it, not with the purpose of making the best of this world's conditions, but in order to know God and participate in his Kingdom.

Perhaps his attitude can be best understood when we think again of that idea of the glory of God which plays so great a part in Hebrew religion. It springs from the belief that while God himself is unknowable we can apprehend him in the light which shines out from him. Things visible, to those who can see them rightly, express something beyond themselves; they reflect, in some measure, the being of their Creator. This suggestion of God can be discerned in nature, in the catastrophes and the majestic unfolding of the world's history. For Jesus it was apparent most of all in the moral law. Here he was conscious of the unique manifestation of God. Truth, goodness, love, belong to God's intrinsic being; in the most intimate sense they are divine, and wherever they are found his glory reveals itself. So the aim of Jesus was to proclaim the moral law in its purity, in order that by knowing it men might know God. It is for this reason that he makes his demands absolute. Other moralists

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have been careful to limit and qualify, perceiving that too rigid an insistence on one duty will interfere with others, or repress natural instincts which also have their just claim. Aristotle, for instance, bases his whole ethic on the conception of the golden mean, and this, in some degree, must hold true of all purely ethical systems. Jesus affirms his principle without compromise or reserve. You must love your enemies; you must forgive a wrong not seven times but seventy times seven. What he values in the moral law is the manifestation of the divine nature, which becomes the more apparent the more each demand is taken in its absolute extent. "Be ye perfect, even as your heavenly Father is perfect."⁷

It is this recognition of something behind the ethical which gives to the ethic of Jesus the character of revelation. From one point of view he simply revised the existing morality. He revised it, to be sure, in such a manner as to transform it. When his teaching is compared even with that of the prophets or the great Stoic moralists we are conscious that while confirming those principles of action which had approved themselves to the profoundest thinking of the race he gave them a new depth and compass, and disclosed their full significance. He showed that each of the old commandments involved a range of duties which had never hitherto been suspected. He arranged the moral duties on a new scale, assigning a cardinal place to some which had been disparaged or forgotten. He changed the whole nature of morality by throwing em-

⁷ Matt. 5:48.

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phasis not on the outward act but on the motive out of which it springs. Above all, he substituted will for law. Discarding the countless rules on which right action had formerly depended, he aimed at creating in men a moral temper, a will so conformed to the will of God that all goodness should be free and spontaneous, growing out of the right will like fruit out of a tree. In all these ways he stands out as the great moral discoverer. While enforcing the old ethical demands he brought out their inner meaning for the first time.

Yet this revision of the moral law did not in itself constitute his revelation. What he gave was something entirely new, of which his ethical teaching was only the outcome and expression. This has been recognised, more or less consciously, in all times since. We think of Jesus as the great teacher, whose precepts are all-sufficient for the right guidance of life, and yet we have to acknowledge that, taken by themselves, they carry us only a little way. They cannot be applied, in any direct manner, to one-thousandth part of the complex moral issues which confront us in our modern world. We find direction from Jesus because he gave us something which is over and above the precepts. He imparted, if one might so express it, the light by which all things in human life might be understood in their true value and relations. He was the revealer because he gave that light—not because he pointed to one thing and another which might be seen by it.

This light consists in the knowledge of that higher reality which he calls the Kingdom of God. The phrase

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was taken over from the current religion, and along with it much of the apocalyptic thought and imagery. But by means of it Jesus describes a certainty which had come to himself by immediate revelation. Living in this world he had become aware of another, entirely different, which is over against it. He was more sure of it than of the world around him, but he could not have reached his knowledge of it by any reflection on things he saw. Some veil must have been lifted for him, so that he could look beyond. This comes out clearly when we compare his teaching with that of the apocalyptic writers. They also anticipate a new age when all things will be different, but the difference will be only one of degree. They take the phenomena which they know, and imagine them indefinitely heightened in beauty and magnitude. Whatever is delightful on this earth will be more so, beyond comparison, in the Kingdom of God. So with all the extravagance of their fancy the apocalyptists never rise out of the circle of earthly experience. The spiritual world is closed to them. Jesus is conscious of an order which is different in kind from that which we know. The Kingdom, as he conceives of it, is in the strict sense supernatural. It involves conditions which have no place in the present order and seem utterly meaningless. Attempts have often been made to explain the message of Jesus in terms of development. His ideas, we are told, were all present in the older religion, and his work consisted merely in perfecting what had been given him and separating the kernel from the husk. Up to a certain point this may be true, but it leaves out of account the central fact. Jesus took much

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from those before him; he came not to destroy the law and the prophets but to fulfil. But his teaching is grounded in a conception in which the older teaching is not developed but reversed. He thinks of a Kingdom in which values which had hitherto been taken for granted have ceased to be, or have changed into their opposites. Here we discover the profound originality of Jesus, and the secret of his power. He was able to transform all standards and to create new hopes and outlooks, because he brought the knowledge of a different world.

It is from this point of view that we have to explain that element of paradox which has often been noted as one of the chief characteristics of his sayings. He is always making demands which are so obviously extreme that they could never be carried into practice. He delights in statements which appear to contradict the patent fact. This strain in his teaching has often been regarded as nothing but a device for startling his hearers into attention to neglected truths. Poverty has its blessings; enemies ought to be treated mercifully. In order to fasten these precepts in men's minds he sharpens them. He declares that only the poor are truly blessed, that we are bound to love our enemies. So throughout his teaching he calls on us to welcome what we have feared and to honour what we have slighted or despised. It is constantly impressed on us, in studies of the Gospel teaching, that we must allow for a conscious exaggeration on the part of Jesus. To forgive without limit, to renounce everything for the higher spiritual ends is plainly impossible, and he

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can never have intended that we should take him literally. He only declared, with the utmost possible emphasis, that we should be kind and unworldly; and all that is necessary is to grasp the main truth and adjust it for ourselves, in some modified form, to actual conditions. This, however, is to miss what is essential in the thought of Jesus. The apparent paradox belongs, in each case, to the very substance of the saying. He wishes to make it clear that the life of the Kingdom is different in its nature from that of the present world—so different that it seems to conflict with human reason. Matthew has perceived this when he prefixes the Beatitudes to his account of the teaching. They consist of a series of antitheses. All our earthly judgments and standards will be reversed in the Kingdom. What we here regard as illusions are there the sole realities; those who will there stand highest are the outcasts of this world.

In the Sermon on the Mount, as in the Beatitudes which open it, the chief object is to mark the contrast between the earthly order and that of the Kingdom. This discourse is usually brought forward as the convincing proof that Jesus was primarily an ethical teacher, but when we consider it more deeply we can see that his interest was of a totally different kind. The true moralist is bent on discovering the principles whereby man can live under earthly conditions as a rational creature and a member of the human society. In the Greek city-state, in early Rome, in ancient China, we find examples of a well-nigh perfect ethic. It made no extraordinary demands,

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but that was its excellence. It enabled men to fit exactly into their environment, to practise all the necessary virtues, to preserve a balance between the higher duties and a healthy worldliness. Viewed in the light of reason and utility and the actualities of human existence, the ethic of Jesus was altogether wanting. He admitted himself that it was impracticable for the present age. He confessed that by following him a man would lose his life in this world. For it was not this world he was thinking of. His interest was in the Kingdom, in which all the familiar motives and desires would lose their meaning. How can men conform their lives even now to the conditions of that higher reality?

It was that other order of things that he revealed. He deliberately set a standard which is above nature and cannot be defended on any merely natural grounds. Men were to become children of God, and since the will of God was one of absolute goodness they must accept it as their own, doing it on earth as it is done in heaven. This is something very different from what we commonly understand as moral action. The aim of morality is to adjust our life to the given environment, so as to live in it usefully and happily. The one aim of Jesus was fellowship with God. He sought to apprehend the moral law in its purity, and make it the means of rising into the divine life. With this purpose he did not hesitate to overturn those principles of action which the world had hitherto accepted and which, on the whole, had served it well. For to him the religious interest was everything. He saw no other value in the moral law than that it expressed

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God's nature, and provided the means by which men could attain to God.

The work of Jesus, therefore, has to be explained in the light of revelation, and we cannot understand it when it is explained otherwise. By the accident of his race and time he took up the ideas of the prophets, of the later moralists, of the great Rabbis, of the apocalyptists; but all that they gave him belonged to the circumference of his thought—to its modes of expression more than to its substance. What was peculiar to him was his immediate knowledge of that divine order which he called the Kingdom of God. On various occasions the evangelists try to suggest, in imaginative fashion, how this knowledge had come to him. He saw the heavens opened; he heard mysterious voices; he was visited by angels; he was overshadowed by a cloud within which was the presence of God. It is possible that he himself supplied at least the germinal idea of some of these traditions. We know that it was his habit of mind to think in pictures, and he would describe inward experiences in a concrete way; perhaps they came to him visually, as when he saw Satan as lightning fall from heaven. It is evident, however, that he concerned himself little with the modes in which revelation was given. Other prophets have insisted on the truth of their message because they had received it in a manner which on the face of it was supernatural. Jesus only declares his message. If it has come to him in trance or vision he keeps this knowledge to himself, and leaves the divine word to make its own appeal to the divine instinct in man.

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Towards the close of his life he admitted to his disciples that he was Messiah, and it was probably to announce this claim that he made his final journey to the national festival at Jerusalem. Why he was silent on the Messiahship in his earlier teaching we can only guess; most likely he was still doubtful in his own mind. But the claim to be Messiah was only the formal expression of a consciousness which must have been present in him from the first. He knew that God was revealed to him—that he had a unique right to speak for God. There was, however, a further suggestion in his claim to be Messiah. Along with his knowledge that God's will was revealed to him, he felt that a commission was laid on him to make it effective. He was Messiah in the sense that he not only proclaimed the Kingdom, but would also ensure its coming. It must never be forgotten that for Hebrew thought revelation was much more than an intellectual enlightenment. In the knowledge of himself God also imparts a new energy. The man who knows God receives strength to serve him, and in some measure participates in the divine life. It is not merely that right theory has its outcome in right action, for this is by no means always true, and least of all in the moral sphere. According to the Hebrew idea knowledge is itself dynamic. Revelation is at once light and power.

It is from this point of view that we must understand Jesus' conception of himself as the Revealer. When we speak of his teaching we commonly think of him as instructing men on the nature of God and the conduct of the moral life. He taught, no doubt, with wonderful

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charm and persuasiveness, but his work, in its primary intention, was simply one of teaching. This, we are often told, has never been properly recognised until our own time. Formerly it was assumed that he came to perform some mysterious act, and the church was built on this assumption. Now we can see that this was not his purpose. He was a teacher, who sought to direct men to a new way of life. Now it is indeed true that Jesus appeared as a teacher, but his teaching involved much more than instruction. Stress is always laid in the Gospels on the power which accompanied his teaching. The words are related in the closest manner to the miracles, which made apparent to the senses what was no less present in the spoken words. He who could say "Thy sins be forgiven thee" could also say "Take up thy bed and walk." In both sayings there was a power which effected the thing spoken of, and we are meant to understand that this was true of the whole message brought by Jesus. Since it came direct from God there was in it something of the energy which makes the word of God creative. "He spake and it was done." "So shall my word be that cometh out of my mouth; it shall not return unto me void, but shall accomplish the thing whereto I sent it."⁸ According to the Gospels, therefore, Jesus the teacher is also Jesus the Messiah. His revelation of God is of one piece with his bringing in of the Kingdom.

At first sight there might appear to be something magical in this conception of a power inherent in the words of Jesus. He is made to declare explicitly in the Fourth

⁸ Isaiah 55:11.

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Gospel, "The words which I speak to you are spirit and life";⁹ and this is also the underlying thought in the Synoptic record. At a later time sayings of Jesus were employed as wonder-working formulæ, and some notion of this kind still lingers in the mechanical repetition of the Lord's Prayer. It has to be noted, however, that in the Gospels the power of the words is always associated with their content. There seems to have been little effort to preserve the sayings in their literal form, and they are reported differently in each of our Gospels, even when they obviously go back to the same original. Paul hardly ever quotes Jesus literally, and from this it has been inferred that he cannot have known the teaching, or attached little value to it. More probably he uses a liberty which all the early missionaries allowed themselves, and perhaps his avoidance of formal repetition is deliberate. It was the thought of Jesus that mattered, and it would go home more forcibly when expressed in fresh words.

From the first, however, it was realised that the true message of Jesus did not consist either in his words or in the immediate thought conveyed in them. Ideas, even at the best, make their appeal to the intellect, and in faith thus produced there is no certainty. Where argument convinces, a contrary argument may destroy. The word of Jesus was with power, and it was this power which constituted the revelation. He could make men feel as they listened to him that God had come near, and that only the spiritual things were real. He changed the higher life into an actual possession, and this was the meaning,

⁹ John 6:63.

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in the last resort, of his revelation. Nothing is truly known until it is experienced. Love, sorrow, danger, despair, faith, liberty are the most familiar words in every language. All our lives we have heard and read and thought about them, and seem to know everything that they can mean. But in some great moment the thing itself comes into our life. It comes, we say, as a revelation; and when we thus express ourselves in our ordinary speech we are using the term "revelation" in its proper sense. A truth is revealed when it is realised. It may be an old truth, of which nothing can be said that is strictly new, and yet when we grasp it as a living experience it is always marvellous. It brings with it the thrill of a new world discovered. And Jesus was the revealer inasmuch as he gave men not merely a knowledge of God but a living apprehension of God. It may be true that much of his teaching had been anticipated by those before him. This can indeed be proved by critical research into the Rabbinical and other literature, and many have inferred that his claim to originality must therefore be set aside. If he borrowed so much, what was it that he gave? The answer is that he gave the revelation. He brought us into the direct fellowship with God. He made us know as realities what had hitherto been guesses and traditions. The writer to the Hebrews maintains that Christianity is the one religion because it has replaced the ancient symbols with the facts they had represented. Instead of the shadows we have now "the very image of the things."¹⁰ This argument is worked out on the ground of old-world concep-

¹⁰ Heb. 10:1.

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tions which have now grown strange to us, but in his own manner the writer has laid his finger on the real significance of our religion. Christ has revealed the divine life because through him we can possess the thing itself.

The true message of Jesus consisted, therefore, not so much in his actual words as in something which went along with them. When this is understood a great deal in the later teaching that is at first sight unaccountable finds its right explanation. The earthly life of Jesus seems almost to be forgotten, his ethical and apocalyptic ideas are construed metaphysically, he comes before us not as Messiah but as a divine Lord. On these grounds it is held that in the course of the Gentile mission the gospel underwent a complete transformation, and its original purpose was forgotten. In these contentions there is doubtless a measure of truth. It is certain that new currents entered into Christian thinking from the world of Greek and Oriental culture. New categories were employed to elucidate ideas which had been given under Jewish forms. But a much deeper motive was at work. Christian teachers had grown aware that Jesus was much more than a teacher or law-giver. He had communicated to those who knew him his own sense of God. Ever and again in the New Testament the gospel is associated with power; indeed the two ideas of power and the gospel are almost interchangeable. The chief aim of the writers is to convey this element of power which was inherent in their message. They do not hesitate to throw aside the forms which Jesus himself had used and express his meaning in others,

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which would come home more directly to their Gentile readers. Everything is subordinated to the one need of imparting not a message only but a felt experience. Men could know nothing of the gospel unless it brought them into a living relation to God.

Jesus was thus the Revealer; and it is this which gives him his supreme and lasting significance. In some respects the later teachers went far beyond him; and it has been argued that at most he gave only the initial impulse to the mighty movement which we call Christianity. He worked for a year or two as the leader of a small group in an outlying province. All that we certainly know of his life and teaching might be written down on a few pages. Yet he has stood out for 2000 years as the controlling force in history. He has inspired all arts and philosophies, all enterprises for human welfare, the daily life and thought of countless millions of men and women. The words of the Fourth Evangelist have come literally true, that if everything were written concerning this man the world would not contain the books. It has seemed to many that the effects have been utterly out of proportion to the cause. They tell us that if Christianity is an immeasurable river it has proceeded from a multitude of streams, of which that which arose in Galilee is only one, although it happened by accident to be the source. But it is a true instinct which has impelled men in all times to see in Jesus himself the essential fact in his religion. All the rest has been outcome and elaboration. Jesus was the Revealer. In him was life and the life was the light of

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men. It was he who broke through the barrier that shut out the higher world. He brought us the knowledge of God and the power of God. What he gave may seem little when we compare it with the tremendous development which has followed, but it must ever remain the truth and substance of the Christian religion.

CHAPTER V

THE HELLENISTIC KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

JESUS had delivered his message under the forms he had inherited from Jewish prophecy and apocalyptic; but in the age which followed his death a new framework became necessary. The need had probably begun while the church was still confined to Palestine. Jesus' own generation was one which had responded, in a peculiar degree, to the apocalyptic hope, but there are signs that in the next age it was losing its power of appeal. In the Christian church the hope remained vital long after it had decayed in Judaism; but the church also, as it became conscious of its mission, moved away from the apocalyptic ideas. They proved more and more inadequate to express those deeper meanings which were now apparent in the message of Jesus.

It was the Gentile mission, however, which finally compelled a change of attitude. The missionaries who carried the gospel beyond the bounds of Palestine were Jews, but Jews who had the Gentile background and who adapted their teaching to the Gentile mind. They availed themselves of ideas and beliefs which were foreign to Jesus himself, but which alone could make his purpose intelligible to the Pagan world. As a result the Christian message took on a new character. It was presented not

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only in the Greek language but in terms of Greek, instead of Hebraic thought.

The grand achievement of the Greek genius had been the discovery that the world is rational. Men had hitherto been content simply to accept the mysterious system of things in which they found themselves; but the Greek mind, as far back as we can trace it, was possessed with an insatiable curiosity. It required to know the why and wherefore of all puzzling phenomena, and could not be put off with guesses and fables. Thus it learned to discover that in the seeming confusion there was an order which could be depended on, and that this order had its counterpart in man's own reason. Whatever the agency might be which governed all existence, it must be rational. It worked by laws of number and causality. It sought to create a harmony and was working with a purpose, like the mind of man. So the Greek thinkers arrived at the belief in a sovereign reason, and tried to explain its processes by enquiry into their own reason. More and more, as Greek philosophy became sure of itself, thought was accepted as the ultimate reality. In place of the old mythologies there grew up the doctrine of an infinite reason, pervading and controlling all things. This, by whatever names men might choose to call it, was God.

At the same time there had always been another strain in Greek thinking. It was recognised that in the constitution of the world there was something that could not be reconciled with the rational order. Already in Homer we hear of Necessity as a power which is behind all things

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and to which the gods themselves are subject. With fuller exploration of man's own nature it became apparent that some profound regions of the soul were not governed by reason. This sense of an incalculable element in man was quickened by religious movements which from time to time invaded Greece from the East. Most notably in the eighth century before Christ there appeared the Dionysus worship, with its emphasis on rapture as the means to a higher knowledge. Under conditions which sometimes come spontaneously but may also be induced by outward stimuli, a man is caught out of himself. Some hidden force in his being breaks through the normal modes of thought and behaviour, and in this mood of ecstasy he feels himself in communion with the divine. This conception entered deeply into Greek religion, and its influence can be clearly traced in Greek art and poetry. The higher manifestations of Greek genius were due, in no small measure, to the blending of this sense of the irrational with the cult of reason. It is significant, for instance, that Tragedy grew out of the Dionysiac festival, and was in essence a recognition of those mysterious forces which are too strong for human wisdom. Not only in art and poetry but in Greek philosophy, and above all in the philosophy of Plato, there is the feeling of an ultimate truth which is not accessible to reason. Again and again, at the close of his greatest dialogues, Plato merges his argument in a symbolic myth. He acknowledges that thought can now travel no farther, and has touched the border of a vast realm of mystery. It is not too much to say that this sense of the inexplicable was the quickening

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element in Greek thought, although it worked obscurely in the background. Without it the rational method would have defeated its own end, and would have led to nothing more than some arid, mechanical view of the world. The desire for knowledge was kept alive by the deep-seated conviction that no truth can be fully known.

It must never be forgotten that beneath the Greek rationalism there always flowed this other current. Aristotle, with all his effort to bring everything within the domain of reason, is yet conscious of a reality beyond it. Epicurus, the first apostle of a pure naturalism, allows a place to the gods. He does so, not merely in deference to traditional piety, but because he recognises that behind the material universe there are powers which are unknowable. This twofold attitude of Greek thought is the more striking in view of the antagonism which declared itself, almost from the first, between philosophy and the current religion. Among other races, and conspicuously in Israel, all higher thinking took a religious form; but Greek religion had suffered, at a very early stage, from an arrested development. We have the paradox of a people who were capable of the most profound religious thinking and who yet continued to be, religiously, in the state of children. The reason for this must be sought in two directions. On the one hand, Greek religion had sprung out of nature worship, and had no power of raising itself above that level. The gods were inherently nothing more than natural forces personified, and could not be endowed with attributes that were in any true sense spiritual. On the other hand, religion in Greece

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had always borne a political character. The god was identified with the interest of the city. He stood for a patriotic tradition which must at all points be maintained, and his service consisted, for the most part, in the observance of ancestral rites and civic festivals. Speculation in the sphere of religion was forbidden, as endangering the peace and continuity of the city—with the result that religious ideas had to develop apart from religion. It might appear as if Plato and other thinkers, who strongly attack the popular beliefs, were irreligious, but the very opposite is true. They are prompted essentially by a religious interest. They seek for a spiritual satisfaction which the prevailing forms of worship had failed to offer. This is well illustrated by the example of Euripides, who represents the destructive ideas in their extreme form, and who is yet profoundly religious. He never doubts that there are divine powers which it is fatal to defy—that the great ends of life are of spiritual nature—that ways of knowledge are open which have nothing to do with logical thinking. To this poet of rationalism we owe some of the deepest utterances of ancient religious thought. In all the Greek thinkers we have to allow for a similar duality. The apparent scepticism must not conceal from us the earnestness and reverence with which the Greek mind confronted the world. Nothing can be further from the truth than the common idea of the Greeks as coldly intellectual—satisfied that they had explained the cosmos and had outgrown the ignorant feeling of awe before the unknowable. More, perhaps, than any other people the Greeks were possessed with an abiding sense of wonder,

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restrained in its expression but nevertheless the driving force behind all their speculation.

The century which witnessed the rise of Christianity was also a momentous one in the history of Greek thought. For more than 300 years enquiry had proceeded along the lines of rationalism; now it turned more and more definitely in the other direction. Although the old debates went on between rival philosophical schools they were generally felt to be unreal. Men desired more than ever to find some solution to the great problems, but they ceased to expect it from philosophy. They believed that if it existed anywhere it must be sought by other methods than those of pure reason. This change of outlook is sometimes attributed, almost wholly, to the Oriental leaven which was now working powerfully in the life of the West. Since the time of Alexander, Greece had been united with the old Persian Empire. The Eastern nations had adopted the Greek language and culture, and there had grown up a type of thought which was at once Greek and Oriental. The approved philosophies still held their own, but allowed room increasingly to mystical conceptions, taken over from the religions of the East. But it is too often forgotten that in this commerce with the East, the Greek mind was not merely passive. The foreign influence would have been powerless if it had not co-operated with the deeper strain in Greek thought itself. The new type of speculation was to reach its culminating phase in what is known as Neo-Platonism, and it was fully entitled to claim descent from Plato. The Oriental

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fostering served only to bring to maturity ideas that were inherently Greek.

A change of outlook was inevitable, even if there had been no foreign influence. In the earlier time philosophy had been confident of itself, and the various schools, while opposed to each other, were all agreed on the validity of the rational method. But in the first century of our era this confidence had begun to wane. Ever since the time of Socrates a succession of great thinkers had been asking "What is truth?" and no answer had yet been discovered. The different systems were seen to confute one another. Each apparent advance had opened up new vistas of difficulty. It happens invariably in the history of thought that a triumphant movement leads up to final disaster, and Greek philosophy in the time of Christ was finding itself on the verge of bankruptcy. All thoughtful men were conscious that its effort was futile unless it could ally itself with some other means of knowledge.

This new venture was possible because philosophy, even in its proudest days, had kept a door open to suggestions that were alien to it. Plato had declared that truth was unattainable unless man could be assisted in his seeking by "some divine voice";¹ and this warning had never been forgotten. When we turn from the calm dialectic of the classical thinkers to the vagaries of Hermetic and Gnostic speculation, it might seem as if the defences of philosophy had completely broken down, like those of the Roman

¹ *Phædo*, 35. "We must take the best of the doctrines current among men, and that which is most proof against criticism, and on that as on a raft, we must take our chance of steering our course through life; unless any of us may find a safer and less risky course upon the steadier craft of some divine message" (P. Duncan's translation).

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Empire before the barbarian invaders. Yet the later development may be viewed in a different light. Philosophy was in process of liberating itself—not only through pressure from without but through forces of its own, of which it had not hitherto been fully aware. Plotinus is not the morbid flower of a decadence. He has his place in the great central movement. For sheer depth of philosophical insight he is perhaps the foremost of all the Greek thinkers.

The new type of thought which finally emerged in the first century may be summed up in the word "Gnosis," which now, in large measure, displaced the word "philosophy." In classical Greek, "Gnosis" bears its natural meaning of knowledge, or rather "seeking to know." It is applied, for instance, to a judicial investigation for the purpose of bringing facts to light. In this manner a special shade of meaning came to adhere to the word. It denoted not merely an intellectual knowledge, but one that involved an attitude of mind. It is one thing to know a fact of mathematics, and quite another to know the character of a friend, or the difference between right and wrong. The higher kind of knowledge is often independent of any conscious intellectual effort. As you live with a scene of nature or a work of art or a great truth, you grow aware of its meaning. While your mind is apparently inactive, manifold impressions sink into it and fuse together. You do not strive to meet the object but it comes of its own accord to you and makes itself understood. The word Gnosis, as it was employed in the first

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century, was associated with this other mode of knowledge.

In the earlier time philosophy had relied on the dialectical method, bequeathed by Socrates to his great disciples. It took hold of received ideas and subjected them to close examination, testing the different arguments at every stage, and advancing from one truth to another. The method had now betrayed its limitations, and the question had arisen, "might it not be possible to attain by direct experience to a knowledge beyond the reach of reason?" It has become customary in recent years to connect the new departure with the name of one specific thinker, Posidonius; but from the little that we know of him there seems to be no sufficient ground for assigning him such a crucial importance. He appears, at most, to have been one of a number of teachers who were led, about the same time and under the same influences, to a new method of enquiry. While they retained their philosophical faith they were impressed by the far-reaching significance of religious myths and beliefs. They perceived that here was a realm of truth which had been overlooked, and which reason, by its own light, was incapable of exploring. A new path of knowledge seemed to lie open before them. Philosophy might so ally itself with religious intuition as to break its way into a region that had been inaccessible.

In the course of the following century this type of thinking was developed in many directions, and assumed many fantastic forms. Sometimes it was hardly to be distinguished from philosophy proper. Philo of Alexan-

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dria, to take only one conspicuous example, was a "Gnostic," who sought an immediate enlightenment from his religious belief; yet he justly ranks as a great philosophical thinker. It is often difficult to tell whether he arrives at his daring conclusions by religious or by speculative insight. The masters of Christian Gnosticism, most notably Basilides and Valentinus, allow free rein to their imagination, and yet behind their fanciful constructions we can trace at least the outline of a lofty metaphysical system. On the other hand there was a Gnosis which was little more than superstition—"knowledge falsely so-called," as it is described in the New Testament.² Sometimes it was simply another term for magic, and for this debasement of the name the philosophical Gnostics were themselves largely responsible. In their search for a higher knowledge they fell back on secret traditions, incantations, hidden names of angels and demons, extravagant rites. They lived in an intellectual atmosphere which was similar in many ways to that of the Middle Ages. Roger Bacon, Albertus Magnus, and other famous schoolmen were undoubtedly great thinkers, but were popularly credited with occult powers, and were themselves more than half persuaded of the virtue of their charms and diagrams. No clear line was drawn between the philosopher and what we should now regard as the charlatan. So in the first century a wide extension was given to the meaning of Gnosis. Men had grown aware that there were modes of knowledge other than those of rational enquiry. The new enterprise was still experimental,

² 1 Tim. 6:20.

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and in some of its phases wisdom and folly were strangely mingled together. But with all their eccentricities these thinkers were reaching out to a larger truth. Although the Greek intellectual movement appears to close with them they were not the stragglers of a retreat but the pioneers of an advance.

One of the constant characteristics of Gnosis is the belief in ecstasy as a path towards the higher knowledge. Here we can recognise a genuine element in the Greek tradition. In face of a growing rationalism the Greeks had always preserved their faith in oracles. Plato, while disparaging the poets, had confessed that by a divine inspiration they had given unconscious utterance to wisdom.³ The Dionysiac element had kept its place in religion, alongside of the ancient ritual. Yet the knowledge which came by ecstasy was regarded doubtfully. Plato, in the very dialogue in which he admits its possibility, is careful to insist that nothing is properly known unless it can be demonstrated by reason. The suspicion never died out during the classical period that ecstasy belonged to a barbarian culture. It was not denied that the barbarians were in possession of marvellous knowledge. Greece, indeed, had always tended to over-rate the wisdom stored up in Egypt, India, Chaldea, and other Eastern lands of remote antiquity. Yet in intellectual as in other matters the distinction was observed between Hellenism and barbarism. Hardly an instance is known to us of a Greek who troubled to learn a foreign language, and most of

³ This theme is developed, more especially, in the *Ion*.

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the references to wonderful religions and philosophies existing in other countries are manifestly based on the vaguest hearsay. It was taken for granted that the Greek mind was sufficient to itself, and could best pursue its task if it remained apart. After the union of East and West under Alexander this detachment was no longer possible. Not only did the Greeks become acquainted with Eastern thought, but men of Eastern origin took up the work of Greek philosophy and brought to it their own outlook and tradition. The idea of ecstasy now acquired a new significance. The belief grew up that this strange experience, associated hitherto with abnormal types of religion, might be used as an instrument for philosophical discovery. Ecstasy was not the mere negation of the rights of reason. It marked the state of mind in which the reasoning process attained to its final stage. The thinker could assure himself that at a certain point of his ascent, when his feet could carry him no further, he might rise on wings, and reach heights that had seemed inaccessible. Philo's account of his own experience is well known, and may be regarded as typical. "I am not ashamed to relate the manner in which I am myself affected. Sometimes, having come empty I suddenly become full, ideas being invisibly showered upon me and planted from above, so that by a divine possession I am filled with enthusiasm, and am absolutely ignorant of the place, of those present, of myself, of what is said, of what is written; for I have a stream of interpretation, an enjoyment of light, a most keen-sighted vision, a most distinct view of the things in question, such as would be given

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through the eyes from the clearest manifestations.”⁴ This philosophical ecstasy was very different from the Bacchic frenzy. It was not physical but intellectual. It involved not a confounding of all the faculties in a vague emotion but a blaze of illumination under which the mind saw with the utmost clearness. Yet in both moods there was the sense of a higher knowledge attainable through rapture. It was possible for a man to be so lifted out of himself that for a time he could hold fellowship with the divine. Philo himself contemplates a yet higher phase of the ecstatic condition in which a man ceases to exercise his conscious reason and becomes one with the eternal principle of being. In Neo-Platonism this absorption into the divine was declared explicitly to be the final aim and reward of the philosophical life. Plotinus was known to have achieved this ultimate state of ecstasy four times. His disciple Porphyry could lay claim to only one such experience. It was admittedly rare, but behind all the later thought lies the conviction that without it there can be no true apprehension of God. The divine element in man is repressed and darkened by his individual consciousness, and this partition must be broken down before God and man can meet together. The highest kind of knowledge consists in a rising out of knowledge.

The effort was thus made, in the Hellenistic world of the first century, to transcend the limits prescribed to reason, and the knowledge thus sought in mystical experience was defined as “Gnosis.” Its nature has been described by one of the teachers to whom the church gave

⁴ *De Migrat. Abr.*, 7.

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the specific name of Gnostics: "the knowledge of who we were, what we have become, where we were, into what place we have been thrown, whither we are hastening, whence we are redeemed, what is birth, what is re-birth."⁵ Gnosis thus differed from ordinary knowledge alike in its object and in its method. On the one hand it aimed at the discovery of ultimate truth. Reason can work only on the data provided for it by the facts and appearances of the sensible world. The effort of Gnosis was to reach out to that which lay beyond them—to the secrets of the future and the unseen, the origin and destiny of the soul, the ground of being. On the other hand, it employed modes of enquiry which were not those of ordinary reason. The natural faculties had failed to lay hold of the final realities, and by their nature are incapable of ever succeeding. Recourse must therefore be had to other means of knowledge. It might be that in the myths and symbols of ancient religions God had spoken, and that by the light thus given men might spell out the hidden things. It was certain that in the soul itself there were capacities not yet explored, affinities between man's own life and the greater life of which he was obscurely conscious. The aim of Gnosis was to awaken these dormant faculties and call them to the aid of reason. If reason was blind there might yet be hidden somewhere in man's irrational nature a true power of vision.

The Greek mind had thus arrived, in its own fashion and by a long, circuitous journey, at that idea of revela-

⁵ *Excerpta Theodoti*, 78 (Clem. Alex.).

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tion which had been the determining factor, almost from the first, in Hebrew thought. The old philosophies had failed of their purpose, and it was now evident that if men were ever to know God it must be by some direct illumination. This was perhaps the chief reason why the Christian message impressed the Gentile world, and why it appealed not only to the simple and ignorant but to many of the most gifted and cultivated minds. It was felt everywhere that if truth was to be known it must be revealed. Paul wrote his Epistle to the Romans around the theme that after trying every other way of salvation the world had found itself "shut in" to the one door of escape by faith in Christ. He might have added, even more truly, that in the quest for truth all roads were now closed except that of revelation. This was why Paul's mission to the Gentiles was so successful. A generation before, he would have met everywhere with the scorn and impatience with which he was heard on the Areopagus by the intellectuals of Athens. But this supercilious attitude was now out of date, even in philosophy. The new time, as represented by its more earnest thinkers, was weary of reasoned theories, and was listening for "some divine voice." This also was why Christianity, in its turn, allied itself so readily with Greek philosophical thought. The gospel and philosophy had no natural points of contact, but philosophy had now accepted the principle of revelation. Not only was it friendly to the assumptions on which the gospel rested, but it was able to present them in something like a consistent theory. Christian teachers could feel themselves free to explain their mes-

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sage in the current terms of Hellenistic Gnosis. It has far too often been taken for granted that under Gentile influence the Christian message was changed into a purely rational system. A change there certainly was, but it did not consist in the rationalising of a truth which had been revealed. The transition was made, not from revelation to reason, but from one idea of revelation to another.

According to Hellenistic thought, revealed knowledge is metaphysical in its nature. It comes directly by divine illumination, but is still, in a strict sense, knowledge. The mind, in its quest for truth, has encountered problems which it has vainly striven to answer, and at last the answer is given, not as the outcome of intellectual effort but as a sudden light breaking in from above. Thus while Gnosis was not philosophy it was determined by the same interest. It was the further stage in the advance of thought, and pre-supposed what had been won already. For Christianity, on the other hand, the essential motive is the practical and religious one. Men find themselves in a world which is infinitely difficult, not because it offers so many problems to the intellect, but because it thwarts man's endeavour as a moral being. Why do the righteous suffer? Do the great human instincts for love and justice and goodness correspond to any reality? That which is offered in revelation is nothing else than the assurance of God, as the strength and refuge of those who love him. We have seen that in Hebrew usage the word "knowledge" always carries with it an ethical suggestion. God is "known" through obedience to him; to know God is to do his will, and the end of knowledge is not

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enlightenment but moral power and freedom. The Greek word "Gnosis" has none of this ethical connotation, and applies only to the knowledge which is concerned with true being. No thought can attain to that ultimate mystery, and it must be apprehended by a flight beyond thought. This Greek idea was adopted by Christian teachers for the interpretation of their own message, and in not a few respects the acceptance of it was unfortunate. Some of the cardinal values of the gospel were obscured when God was conceived not as the God of righteousness but as absolute being. Faith in Christ was largely robbed of its meaning when it was confused with speculations on his nature, as in some abstract sense divine.

At the same time Gnosis was of priceless value to Christianity. It served to bring clearly to light an element in Jesus' own teaching which could not find expression under the limitations imposed on him by Hebrew thought. His aim had been to establish fellowship between men and God; but for Judaism the very idea of participation in the divine life was impious. God was the Majesty in the heavens, before whom men could only bow in unutterable awe. The thought of God's transcendence had become ever more pronounced as time went on, with the strange result that the religion of the one God had assumed a form which was hardly to be distinguished from polytheism. God was so infinitely removed from men that the gulf had to be filled in with innumerable angelic beings, intermediate between God and the world.

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Through Gnosis it became possible to seek a direct apprehension of God. It is true that Gnosis could say nothing as to God's will and nature. He was colourless and impersonal—the ultimate being in whom the soul loses itself like a drop of water in a boundless sea. But while Gnosis could affirm nothing about God it offered a direct experience in which men could lay hold of the divine reality. It is for this reason that mysticism, in some form, must always be a necessary element in religion. Although it gives nothing else it brings the sense of immediate contact with God; and through Gnosis this mystical element found its place in Christian faith.

The name of Gnosis is now associated with those wild speculations which arose in the second century, and were set forth, with an endless diversity, in the so-called Gnostic systems. They sometimes expressed ideas of genuine religious value, but were derived in the main from Pagan myth and metaphysic, and were often subversive of the cardinal Christian beliefs. In the later New Testament books they are not unjustly classed together as "false teachings." These speculations, however, are not to be confused with Gnosis itself, which did not consist in any kind of system but in a new method of seeking the truth. When Paul wrote to Corinth that the world by wisdom had not known God⁶ he was stating a fact, which was already apparent to discerning minds among the Greek themselves. They were aware that the philosophical quest had proved fruitless, and that if God was ever to be known he must himself speak to men. This conviction

⁶ I Cor. 1:21.

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had its outcome in Gnosis. It ran into strange extravagances. It remained for the most part rooted in the philosophical conceptions out of which it sprang. None the less the Greek thinkers had discovered a way by which they could draw near to God. They had found a revelation, which gave new meaning to the revelation in Christ.

CHAPTER VI

REVELATION IN THE TEACHING OF PAUL

CHRISTIAN theology began with Paul. This was once considered his title of honour, but in recent years it has been urged against him as a reproach. He transformed the gospel, we are told, into a body of doctrine, and thereby defeated its purpose. If we are ever to understand our religion we must get back from Paul to Jesus.

Nothing, however, could be more unjust to Paul than to think of him simply as a builder of doctrines. He himself emphatically denied this conception of his teaching in almost every chapter he wrote. He had first known the gospel in the sudden light which blinded him on the road to Damascus, and his aim ever afterwards was to proclaim it as a revelation. God has manifested himself in Jesus Christ. Men are no longer to seek for God by their own vain effort, for God has come to them. This, for Paul, is the whole meaning and power of the Christian message. He knows that to the wise it may seem foolishness, but he is content to declare it in all its simplicity. It is a message from God, and the foolishness of God is wiser than men.

So Paul was not a theologian if it is implied by this

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name that he set himself the task of rationalising the Christian beliefs. He was indeed a great thinker, and his Epistles contain many passages of abstruse argument. He had acquired a wealth of Rabbinical learning and a knowledge of philosophical terms and ideas such as the earlier Apostles had lacked. Yet his one object is to affirm that the gospel cannot be reduced to a rational system. Again and again he indignantly denies that he had been led to it by force of argument, on his own part or that of others. "For I neither received it of men, neither was I taught it, but it came to me by revelation of Jesus Christ."¹ He employs all the resources of reason in order to demonstrate that through Christ we possess a truth which is beyond reason and must be accepted by an act of faith.

It is this which makes Paul so difficult to understand. His teaching is embodied in a number of doctrines, stated in logical language; and we assume, not unnaturally, that he is seeking to think out the Christian message and present it in reasoned form. Yet his syllogisms, when logically tested, break down; his doctrines are elusive and contradict each other. From this it has been inferred that he was vague and confused in his own mind, or that he was cramped by his Rabbinical training, and attached convincing value to arguments which we should now dismiss as sophistries. In more recent days it has been maintained that in his thought there is an unknown factor—some Jewish or Hellenistic idea which he leaves unexpressed but which is constantly present. Various

¹ Gal. 1:12.

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efforts have been made to discover this missing clue by which his reasoning may be followed through all its intricate windings.² But the truth is that Paul is not to be interpreted by any rules of logic. He throws his beliefs into the moulds of argument, but the proof of them does not depend on the argumentative process. He wishes us to feel, as he himself does, that he teaches what has been revealed. The reasoning is to be accepted because it has behind it a divine certainty. Often, indeed, he abandons even the pretence of reasoning. He demands that the gospel should be believed on the very ground that it is contrary to man's wisdom. God's action defies all human calculation, and by that we know that it is divine. Jesus was the Messiah because he was utterly different from the Messiah whom men had looked for; his death was ignominious and was therefore meant by God for his exaltation; the requirements he laid on us are wrong in the sight of men, and must therefore be divinely right. On like grounds Paul is convinced that the Spirit comes from God. It brings a knowledge which cannot be reconciled with anything that men have thought and believed; it guides us in directions opposite to those of human prudence; it certifies as true what all our wisdom holds to be impossible. This strain of paradox is everywhere present in Paul's teaching, as in that of Jesus, and belongs to its intrinsic nature. Paul had not reasoned himself into faith in the gospel but had accepted it in spite of reason. It had suddenly overpowered him,

² The latest and most ingenious is that of Schweitzer in his book *The Mysticism of Paul*.

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demolishing everything that had hitherto seemed surest. No choice was left him but to believe what was incredible, and this reversal of all his judgments was the proof that God had spoken. Something new and undreamed-of had come into the world through Christ; a higher truth had forced itself on man's knowledge and had compelled assent. So for Paul the strangeness of the message became the touch-stone of its divine quality. It opposed itself to all human wisdom that the excellency of the power might be of God and not of men.³

Paul takes his stand, therefore, on the fact that in Christ God has revealed himself. He does not seek to prove the message. He seeks only to drive home to us his own conviction that it is revealed and on that ground must be accepted. What we call the Pauline doctrines are all based on this postulate. The real aim in all of them is to accentuate the character of the gospel as revelation. Paul would himself have been the first to acknowledge that his reasoning as such is inconclusive. When, for instance, he formulated his doctrine of Justification he never expected to win assent to it on intellectual grounds. His object was simply to make clear that, however men might regard it, this was God's method of salvation. It must be accepted by men not because it is reasonable, but because it is divine. "Herein is the righteousness of God revealed, from faith to faith."⁴ All is revelation, and has therefore to be apprehended from first to last by faith alone.

³ II Cor. 4:7.

⁴ Romans 1:17.

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Paul assumes, then, that there is a knowledge which is given to men immediately by God. Man, in his own nature, is limited, and there is a region of truth of which he can make nothing. "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him."⁵ He cannot understand them, he cannot even conceive that they exist, until God, of his own initiative, makes them known. Paul is so profoundly convinced of man's inability that he cannot bring himself to speak of man's knowing God, even when the knowledge has been vouchsafed. Man's part in the knowledge of God is a wholly passive one. "To know God, or rather to be known by him."⁶ "Then shall I know, even as also I am known."⁷ God has to bestow not only the knowledge but the capacity for it. The revelation is so entirely God's work that man cannot tell whether he is himself knower or known—just as in the act of seeing we cannot separate our faculty of vision from the light to which it responds. Man apprehends that for which also he is apprehended. He is aware, when he finds God, that God himself is the finder.

The knowledge is given, and by the intrusion of their own wisdom men only defeat the grace which would endue them with that higher knowledge. It had been the error of the Greeks to trust wholly to their own seeking, and they had thereby not only missed God but had wandered ever more hopelessly astray. God must give the knowledge of himself, and man's part is one of pure receptivity. At the same time Paul admits that man

⁵ I Cor. 2:14.

⁶ Gal. 4:9.

⁷ I Cor. 13:12.

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must contribute something before he can be thus receptive. It is God who manifests himself, but all his approach to man would be ineffectual unless man had some instinct for him, some power of responding to him. Paul grants, therefore, that there is a natural revelation, an inward light which is from God.⁸ The Greeks had identified it with reason, but Paul thinks of it as something which is deeper than reason and often conflicts with it. It is that in man which recognises and approves the will of God; and if men had allowed themselves to be guided by it they would have attained at least to some glimpses of the truth. By disobedience to it they have caused it to be quenched in them, or at least to become inoperative.

Paul never follows out that idea of the inward light which he discusses in the opening chapters of Romans. He there employs it for a merely negative purpose—that of proving that the Gentiles, as well as the Jews, are guilty before God. Although they have not transgressed the divine will as given explicitly in the Law, they have yet sinned against that inward knowledge of it which all men possess. Paul is also anxious to point out that the natural revelation is at best obscure and inadequate. From the light within them men might have learned just enough about God to preserve them from gross error, but they could never have had the full revelation which has been offered them in Christ. It is difficult to say how the gospel was related, in Paul's mind, to the natural revelation. Did he assume that in all men there was some-

⁸ Romans 2:14 *f.*

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thing that anticipated the Christian message and made them capable of responding to it? He never says so in explicit words. At the most we can connect his idea of the inward revelation with that of the "inner man"—the deeper self which would fain conform to the higher will. Since man is made in the image of God he has that in him which is turned towards God and knows that his will is right.⁹ It is helpless, however, until it is quickened by the Spirit, and is more a potentiality than a revelation. Paul would doubtless have admitted that this element in man's nature is all-important, but he does not allow that God can in any real sense be known by the inward light. At this point he breaks with the assumption of Gnosis, which held that God might be known through mystical contemplation. Although himself a mystic, and deeply affected by many of the ideas of Gnosis, Paul never thinks of man as entering into immediate union with God. Apart from Christ there can be no real knowledge of God, and only through Christ can man participate in the divine life.

For Paul, therefore, Christ is the revelation. He does not hold merely that Christ has enlarged and perfected man's earlier knowledge of God. This is the idea suggested in the Epistle to the Hebrews, where God's message through his Son is contrasted with the fragmentary messages to which it has at last given substance and completion. The Fourth Gospel, likewise, conceives of God as ever revealing himself. There is a "light which lighteth every man," and from time to time it has burned

⁹ Romans 7:15 f.

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brightly in God's messengers, though it has now shone out with its full splendour in the Word made flesh. Paul, however, sees the revelation in Christ as unique and absolute. The value of all previous messages had been temporary and provisional. They had pointed to Christ and given assurance of his coming and brought comfort and encouragement while the world was waiting for him. But in the nature of things, according to Paul's view, there could be only the one revelation.

How was it, then, that God had made himself known in Christ? Paul makes little explicit reference to the teaching of Jesus, or to the ministry that had preceded his death. He declares that he had resolved to know nothing of Christ after the flesh.¹⁰ The earthly life, as he saw it, was only the prelude to the crowning drama in which Christ had suffered for man's redemption and had become "Son of God with power through his resurrection from the dead."¹¹ From this it has sometimes been inferred that the Christ of Paul was not the historical Jesus but a heavenly being—the Messiah or Lord to whom he transfers the name of Jesus. In the moment of his conversion he had received a vision of the Lord of glory, and had identified him with the Jesus whom he was persecuting—so that henceforth he believed that Jesus by his death had accomplished a divine work for men and had been glorified and exalted. Some colour is lent to this view by the transcendental character of much of Paul's teaching. He thinks of Christ as the Lord from heaven,¹² who had

¹⁰ II Cor. 5:16.

¹¹ Romans 1:4.

¹² I Cor. 15:47.

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descended to earth to do battle with man's enemies—sin, the flesh, the Law, death. All this is described in realistic fashion, with the aid of Gentile legend and Jewish tradition. The forces of evil are personified; the death on the Cross takes on the form of an actual combat, in which Christ triumphs over principalities and powers.¹³ It has to be admitted that Paul tends to confuse the mythology which he has woven around the revelation with the revelation itself. This has been the temptation of prophets in all ages. They apprehend the truth in some vivid imaginative fashion, and the mode in which they visualise it becomes for them an integral part of the truth itself. Too often, indeed, the truth is almost lost entirely in the myth or symbol.

Yet behind Paul's mythology there is always the thought of Jesus, as he had lived and taught and suffered. Here, and not in the actual doctrines, we must seek the religion of Paul. It is a passionate religion, and the passion that inspires it is not an intellectual one, but a burning devotion to a person.¹⁴ Nor is this person in any sense imaginary. Paul does indeed direct his faith to the exalted Christ, but it is not true that he takes the heavenly Messiah of Jewish apocalyptic and gives him the name of Jesus. What he does is just the opposite. He takes Jesus in his historical character and sets him in the apocalyptic frame-work. He lifts him, so to speak, out of the earthly plane, and clothes him in the majesty of the heavenly Messiah. It might fairly be said that by his resolve not to

¹³ Col. 2:15.

¹⁴ This is nowhere so finely demonstrated as in F. C. Porter, *The Mind of Christ in Paul*.

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know Jesus after the flesh Paul became the first who really knew him. Looking at him under the higher light he was able to detach him from all accidental circumstance—his Jewish nationality, his acceptance of the Law, the modes of thought and language imposed on him by his time. The others had seen Jesus as through a mist; Paul saw him as he was, in his eternal significance. Not only so, but those attributes of Jesus which had drawn men to him, his love and compassion and self-sacrifice, were invested with a halo. They were associated for Paul with one who now reigned in heaven. They shone out, in their true nature, as divine.

It is from this point of view that we must understand the conversion experience, which was the root of all Paul's Christian thinking. Sometimes it has been regarded as in the full sense visionary and supernatural. Paul had hitherto known nothing about Jesus, except that he had been crucified as a false Messiah. To the end of his days he remained ignorant of the historical Jesus, and refused on principle to acquaint himself with the facts; but in that moment when he saw a light in heaven he received an impression, extraordinarily vivid, of a heavenly being whom he knew to be Jesus. His Christian faith sprang wholly out of that experience, whether we choose to call it revelation or illusion. Another view is more commonly accepted in our day, and is undoubtedly better supported by the data both of history and psychology. Before his conversion Paul had learned much about Jesus. He knew the broad facts of his life and

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character; he had heard the gospel expounded by Stephen and other disciples. In spite of himself he was interested in the new teaching and had pondered it deeply, and his very hostility was an effort to beat down a secret attraction. The conversion was sudden only in its form and circumstances. Some incident, perhaps trivial, released a spring, and the convictions which were struggling under the surface were able to break loose. Paul answered definitely, as he had already done unconsciously, to the call of Jesus. Now in both these views there are elements of truth, but they seem both to miss what is essential. Paul had indeed learned about Jesus and had been attracted to him more than he knew; but at the same time a disclosure was made to him which did not result from the operations of his own mind. Knowing the facts, he suddenly became aware of their significance. In a flash of blinding insight he perceived that the will which had manifested itself in Jesus was the will of God. Thus in addition to what he knew already, something was revealed to him. He had the vision of Christ, not merely as he had appeared to men, but as he was in his hidden nature—the power of God and the wisdom of God.

We can make nothing of Paul's message unless we allow for this revelation which lies at the heart of it. Too often it is taken for granted, in spite of his own assertions, that he arrived at his faith by some kind of reasoned process. He had meditated on the Christian beliefs; he had compared them with the teaching of prophecy and apocalyptic; he had borrowed suggestions from Greek thought and Hellenistic religion. Combining all that he

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thought and knew he finally worked out that peculiar and complex theology which we call Paulinism. Now it may be granted that in the presentation of his beliefs Paul availed himself of a great variety of current ideas; but the beliefs themselves are not to be explained from the forces and influences which acted on him from time to time. To construe them in this manner is to misunderstand his message at its very roots. He had learned Christ, as he is never tired of repeating, by revelation. God had shone on him in the face of Christ;¹⁵ and all his subsequent thinking was nothing but his effort to interpret what had been given to him in that vision. Some analogy to his experience may be found in the life of every great discoverer. The new truth which is destined to change the world is not the product of long study and observation. These must play their part afterwards; but the truth itself comes in a moment, seemingly out of nowhere, perhaps when the mind is occupied with quite other things. That instantaneous thought contains in it the germ of everything. The man to whom it comes, and thousands after him, will spend their whole lives in proving and applying that truth which was given mysteriously in a single flash. To be sure it could not have come except to a mind which was stored with special knowledge and turned in a certain direction; but without the one inspired moment all this would have been unavailing. So with the experience of Paul. Undoubtedly much was due to the influences that moulded him and the reflections that were constantly passing through his

¹⁵ II Cor. 4:6.

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mind; but they could never of themselves have led him to his message. The one vital thing was the bursting in on him of a new light. "I neither received it of men, neither was I taught it, but by revelation of Jesus Christ." It was from this revelation, and from this alone, that Paul derived his gospel.

He was himself convinced that on the way to Damascus Christ had appeared to him in actual presence. What really took place in that supreme moment we have no means of knowing, and we may gather from Paul's own guarded references that he did not know himself. While he never doubts the truth of his vision he seems to think of it as inward no less than outward. "When it pleased God to reveal his Son in me."¹⁶ "God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, shone in my heart."¹⁷ He confesses that he knows nothing of his state of consciousness in those later ecstasies when he was caught up into the third heaven; "Whether in the body or out of the body I cannot tell."¹⁸ We can well believe that in his first vision likewise all sense of inward and outward disappeared. This does not mean, however, that the whole incident of Paul's conversion can be explained psychologically, as a subjective crisis in which an idea possessed the mind so strongly that it visualised itself, like the dagger in Macbeth. That imagination played its part need not be doubted, but it supplied only the form and mechanism of the experience. Whatever was the nature of Paul's vision—whether it was palpable to the bodily eye or was spiritually suggested, it came to him from outside of

¹⁶ Gal. 1:16.

¹⁷ II Cor. 4:6.

¹⁸ II Cor. 12:2.

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himself, and to this it owed its whole significance. He was aware in that moment of a knowledge breaking in on him from another world, and he thought of the gospel henceforth as given him by revelation. Not only so, but he found here the central meaning of the gospel. Something had been given to men from beyond. A hand had been stretched out to rescue them; in their helplessness they had obtained access to a divine power. This is the master-thought of Paul's religion, and his various doctrines are nothing, in the last resort, but so many different ways of defining it. Men have vainly sought for God, but in Christ he has himself come to them. They have tried to win for themselves knowledge and life and salvation and have failed; for they cannot by their own effort rise out of the earthly order to which they belong. All that they have desired and could never find has now been given to them, by the grace of God in Christ.

In his preface to Romans Paul states this truth explicitly as the substance of his message. "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed, from faith to faith."¹⁹ This thesis is developed in the body of the Epistle with a marvellous wealth of thought and eloquence, and also with a dialectical subtlety which tends at times to obscure it. Yet the main idea is never lost, amidst all the mazes of the argument. The gospel, as Paul knows it, has been directly given by God. What man could never have discovered

¹⁹ Romans 1:16, 17.

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for himself has been revealed. Paul has indeed thought much about this gospel, and gathers together, in the Epistle, the results of his thinking. Yet his knowledge of it has not come to him by any process of thought; he has not received it from men, neither was he taught it. His aim is to impress on his readers that they also must accept by faith what God has revealed.

In one sense the revelation is not an immediate one. Paul is aware, and his whole teaching is built on this conviction, that he knows God only as made manifest in Christ. He has entered into a mystical union not with God himself but with Christ, who in some manner represents the divine nature. A contrast is drawn by many modern writers between this "Christ-mysticism" of Paul and what they regard as the true mysticism, in which there is the sense of direct union with God. Already in the Fourth Gospel a suggestion is thrown out that the approach to God through Christ is a preliminary though necessary stage which will give place at last to full and direct knowledge. "At that day ye shall ask in my name, and I say not unto you that I will pray the Father for you; for the Father himself loveth you."²⁰ In Paul's view, however, it is this so-called "true mysticism" which is imperfect. He sees, for one thing, that it yields nothing more than a vague apprehension of God in his abstract being. To know God, in any real sense, is to understand his will and purpose. "Who hath known the mind of the Lord?"²¹ That must always be the vital question in religion, and it cannot be answered by any effort of mystical

²⁰ Jer. 16:26, 27.

²¹ I Cor. 2:16.

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Gnosis. The mind of God is known according as we can say "We have the mind of Christ." Not only so, but this knowledge of God in Christ is for Paul the immediate knowledge. It might seem that beyond Christian faith there must be a higher experience of direct communion with God. In every age there have been mystical thinkers to whom Christ has appeared to be merely the ladder which helps us upwards but in the final attainment is left behind. Paul would answer that in Christ we have the attainment. While God may be known apart from Christ, it is only through Christ that he can be known immediately; and this, for Paul, is the supreme value of the Christian message. God, whom men have been seeking for, has now come to them. Their knowledge of him has been changed from dream into actuality. To be sure their knowledge is mediated through Christ, just as the thirsty traveller, drinking at the well, is refreshed by means of water. Does he ask that the refreshment should be given to him directly, in some ideal fashion, apart from the well? No; it is in the act of drinking that he is directly satisfied.

Paul is thus concerned with a knowledge of God which has come by revelation, and could not have come otherwise. It is for this reason that he always thinks of the gospel objectively—one might almost say, mythologically. Often he has been accused of transforming the message of Jesus into a sort of sacred legend, woven out of suggestions from Jewish apocalyptic and mystery religion. All this symbolism, we are told, must be discarded or rationalised before we can grasp the spiritual ideas which

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he is seeking to express. It is by no accident, however, that Paul's thinking is cast in this realistic form, for the form answers to something which is essential in the thought itself. It is indeed an accident that he makes use of certain conceptions, current in the world of his time and now strange to us. But in presenting the work of Christ objectively he only gives effect to his central belief that it had all been of the nature of revelation. God, of his own will, has made himself known to men. They are redeemed not by what they do but by that which has been done for them. So Paul conceives of Christ as sent down from the heavenly world to do battle with the powers of evil, which at last slay him on the Cross, and thereby, according to the divine plan, compass their own destruction. In his more esoteric teaching Paul seems to have elaborated this cosmic drama with great fulness,²² and perhaps did not intend that every detail of it should be accepted as literal fact. The mysterious knowledge was given him, apparently, in those moods of trance, when he could not tell whether he was in the body or out of it; and what he says of his own condition he might also have said of the things he saw. Whether they were palpable reality or only images and symbols, he could not tell. Yet this does not mean that we must interpret his realism in terms of abstract ideas, for it is precisely this which he is anxious to prevent. He was assured that the gospel had brought to man's knowledge an action on the part of God. Something had happened in the supernatural world which man, by his own knowledge, could never have

²² I Cor. 2:6 f.

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imagined or discovered. This, for Paul, was the cardinal truth about the Christian message.

The question here arises as to whether Paul makes the ethical interest the ultimate one in Christianity. He seems often to lay the whole stress, not on the moral but simply on the supernatural quality of that new life to which we attain through Christ. He assumes, apparently, that as there is a material sphere there is also a spiritual one, out of which Christ came and to which he has now ascended. When our human nature has been conformed to that divine order, everything follows of its own accord. The will is renewed; the life which was in bondage to evil passion is set free, and is directed towards life and holiness. In not a few passages the Spirit seems to be conceived as a sort of purer essence which enters into the believer and changes him in the very constitution of his nature. He is lifted, not merely into a new moral life but into a new condition of being.

Now it cannot be denied that Paul is everywhere mastered by moral passion. He stands in the true succession of the Hebrew prophets. Behind all his teaching there is a boundless reverence for the moral law, as he found it exemplified in Jesus. From this it is inferred, not unnaturally, that his message is fundamentally ethical. He indeed wraps up his ethical judgments in a theological system, but this must be set down to the peculiarities of his own mind and of the mind of his age. Essentially he was nothing but a great prophet of righteousness, and his message must all be interpreted in the light of his

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moral convictions. When he speaks of a new life to which we have entrance through the Spirit, he is only saying, in his metaphysical fashion, that men are morally transformed when they follow the teaching and example of Jesus. This, however, is to miss the cardinal factor in Paul's religion. It is true that his interest is always ethical, and that he considers everything to be worthless that does not have its issue in active Christian living. His loftiest and most characteristic utterance is the great chapter in which he extols the supreme gift of love. We cannot but feel that here and elsewhere he deliberately breaks away from the Gnosis to which God is nothing more than transcendent Being. Yet Paul is not to be regarded as primarily an ethical teacher. He does not think of God in terms of the moral law, but of the moral law in terms of God. His interest is ethical because he sees in righteousness the clearest expression of a divine reality which lies behind it. It must be admitted, therefore, that Paul is intent on something which he conceives of as beyond the ethical, and this has often been singled out as the grand defect of his thinking, due to his mistaken effort to combine the gospel with the ideas of Hellenistic Gnosis. But if it is a defect it belongs to the very substance of his teaching. He found in Christianity not merely a higher ethic but literally a higher life—a participation in the divine as against the earthly nature. It was through the new ethic that this higher life was made intelligible to him. Had it not been for the moral greatness of Jesus, Paul would never have had that vision of him as the Lord of glory, on the way to Damascus. But what he realised

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in that vision was the glory, the divine nature, of him who had so perfectly obeyed the will of God. Through his obedience Jesus had opened a window into the higher world. He had made it possible for men to rise out of the earthly and phenomenal and to lay hold of the eternal. It was in this sense that Paul henceforth understood the Christian message and imparted it to others. He sought to make clear to them what Jesus had revealed by his life and death—not merely a new righteousness but a new world of being.

This becomes evident when we turn to two conceptions which are ever recurring in the writings of Paul, and which blend themselves, almost unconsciously, with his ethical and theological teaching. On the one hand, he thinks of the work of Christ as the disclosure of a *mystery*. The word at once suggests the singular saying attributed in Mark's Gospel to Jesus: "To you has been given the mystery of the Kingdom of God."²³ The later evangelists were apparently puzzled by the saying, and make it read, "To you it has been given to know the mysteries of the Kingdom"—implying that in the Christian message there are difficulties which perplex the outside world but are understood by the believer. In Mark, the Kingdom itself is regarded as a "mystery"—a divine fact which lies beyond the reach of man's knowledge. For those who have not been chosen it does not even exist, just as there is no world of sound and sight to the deaf and blind. Almost certainly the whole passage in which the words occur

²³ Mark 4:11. Cf. Luke 8:10. Matt. 13:11.

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is a later addition, which is intruded awkwardly in all the three Gospels, and involves a theory of the Parables which demonstrably was not that of Jesus. The idea of a "mystery of the Kingdom" has been read back into Jesus' own teaching from the thought of Paul.

He invariably uses the word to denote a secret purpose, underlying that which is apparent. "I would not have you ignorant of this mystery"—that the blindness of Israel, which seems fortuitous, is part of a providential design.²⁴ "This mystery is great"—that is, the ordinance of marriage conceals in it a profound religious import.²⁵ "Behold, I show you a mystery": the intention of God when he decreed that some should die and others should survive until the Lord's coming.²⁶ "We speak the wisdom of God in a mystery"²⁷—the wisdom which can be discerned only when we look far beneath the surface. "The mystery of iniquity doth already work";²⁸ here the idea is applied to the spiritual powers of wickedness, which have planned their final outbreak and are covertly leading up to it through events in the present. So in Paul's mind there is always the conviction that beneath the facts as we know them a deeper significance lies hidden. This principle is applied even to Christian beliefs and institutions. The message of Christ, the Lord's Supper, the church and its worship have a value and meaning for all men. Yet those who possess the Spirit can see truth which is concealed from others. They discern the motive which is behind the doctrine. They know the purpose of what seems on the

²⁴ Romans 11:25.

²⁷ I Cor. 2:7.

²⁵ Eph. 5:32.

²⁸ II Thess. 2:7.

²⁶ I Cor. 15:51.

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face of it a formal act of worship. Paul tells us that "to those who are mature"—to his older, more enlightened converts—he imparts a secret "wisdom."²⁹ What it consisted in we can only guess, but we need not suppose that it was something different from his ordinary teaching. It dealt rather, as he himself suggests, with the further implications of the teaching. The saving truths were the same for all; but what did they rest on? How were they related to the whole purpose of God?³⁰

Paul speaks then, of a number of "mysteries," and seems to distinguish them as greater and less in value; but they are all like branches or twigs of a single tree. That which appears in Mark as "the mystery of the Kingdom" is described by Paul as "the mystery of the gospel," or simply as "the mystery." He thinks of himself as endowed with a special gift of insight, enabling him to perceive and interpret this "mystery" which forms the background of the Christian message. In the Epistles to Colossians and Ephesians his conception of it finds its fullest expression, though it is pre-supposed in his thought generally. From all eternity God has been working towards the fulfilment of a great plan, which has determined all his action in his government of the world. It has remained hidden in the depths of the divine mind, and not even the angels have surmised it. Through ignorance of it the wisdom of men has been utterly futile, since it constitutes the key without which all the work

²⁹ II Cor. 2:6 f.

³⁰ Some elements of this esoteric teaching are perhaps divulged in the Epistles of Colossians and Ephesians.

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of God is unintelligible. It is this divine purpose which has now been disclosed in the gospel.

According to some modern scholars Paul took over his idea of a mystery from Hellenistic religion. In all the cults of the time there were secret rites, divulged only to an inner group of initiates, which were supposed to carry with them a profound significance. These were the "mysteries" in which the true import and efficacy of the religion were to be found. It is argued that Paul adopted the word, along with the ideas involved in it, and thereby brought Christianity into line with the prevailing modes of worship. He changed it explicitly into a "mystery religion." This, however, is to understand Paul too narrowly. The word "mystery" had no doubt its origin in ancient religious practice, but it had now passed into the common Greek vocabulary, as many religious words have made their way into ordinary English. When Paul spoke of a "mystery" he most probably never reflected on the literal meaning of the word. Moreover he uses it in a sense which is quite opposed to that which it bore in Pagan worship. The mysteries of the various cults were to be kept absolutely secret; that was the outstanding fact about them, and the word itself had been coined to enforce it.³¹ Paul thinks of the mystery of the gospel as the great truth which he is bound to declare. He says that he has been called as an Apostle in order that he may make the mystery known to all men; and to any votary of the cults such language would have sounded like blasphemy. With Paul, moreover, the whole stress is laid on

³¹ It seems to be derived from the verb which means "to shut the mouth."

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the intrinsic depth of the mystery. It had hitherto been concealed because, in its nature, it was impenetrable to knowledge. No man, by his own wisdom, could ever have discovered the eternal plan of God, and even now, when it had been revealed by Christ, it had meaning only to those who possessed the Spirit. In the Pagan rites, so far as we can guess at their character from the obscure hints preserved to us, there was no pretence of a truth beyond human understanding. They were significant for no other reason than that they were never to be divulged.

Paul's idea of mystery has nothing in common with that of the cults; but it has definite connections with Gnosis, the language of which is constantly employed in Colossians and Ephesians. Like the Gnostic thinkers Paul seeks to push out beyond the visible world. He is conscious of an ultimate reality, in the light of which all that is knowable must be explained. How can we apprehend this "mystery"? At this point Paul breaks away completely from the philosophical thought of his time. He declares that the higher world cannot be known until God himself reveals it, and that the revelation has now been given in the work of Christ. A distinction is commonly drawn between Paul's doctrine of salvation and his cosmology. It is maintained that in the former he deals with facts of experience, and that his conclusions, though often expressed in old-world language, have permanent religious value. In the latter he works with speculative ideas, based for the most part on a science and metaphysic which have long since lost their meaning. To some extent

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the distinction is a valid one, and the neglect of it by the older theology led to serious mischief and confusion. We are now beginning to see that in the Pauline teaching there is much that must be discounted. Paul knew the Christian gospel, but his philosophical guesses are no more certain than those of any other thinker. At the same time, there is no clear line of division between Paul's cosmology and his doctrine of salvation. They have the same root, and are meant to explain each other. For Paul it was not enough to believe that by his death Christ had achieved a great work for men, assuring them of the grace of God and so raising them into life and freedom. He saw in the Cross an ultimate and universal significance, apart from which it could have no saving value for men. It is not too much to say that Paul anticipated, not in some accidental manner but with a clear sense of its import, the crucial religious problem of our own time. For ages the church has assumed that religion could stand as an interest by itself. Christ came to save men's souls, and we can believe in him as the Saviour. Our theories about the universe and man's place in it can make no difference to that Christian faith by which we seek salvation. But we are now learning that the religious interest cannot be separated from our general outlook on the world. We realise that if the work of Christ has any final validity it must be related somehow to our whole knowledge, to the whole world in which we find ourselves. This has never been perceived more clearly than it was by Paul. We are not to think of him as spinning speculative webs for his own amusement, and there-

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by distracting himself too often from his true task of preaching the gospel of salvation. It was the gospel he was concerned with, from first to last. In order to understand it he tried to see it in its whole significance. Through Christ God had manifested his love to men. He had also thrown light on the meaning of all things. The "mystery" was now revealed—that eternal purpose of God with which he had made the world.

This conception of the mystery is connected, in the closest manner, with another, which likewise conveys the idea of a divine reality which gives meaning to all else. For this other conception he is in no way indebted to Hellenistic thought. We have seen that in the Old Testament God is regarded as manifesting himself in his glory. He is invisible, but a radiance shines out from him and from everything he has touched by his presence. Whatever bears the divine imprint reflects the glory. Paul thinks of it as supremely evident in Christ. "God has given us the light of the knowledge of his glory in the face of Jesus Christ." It was apparent in him while he lived on earth, and now he possesses a "body of glory"³²—suffused through and through with the divine light. Paul believed that at his conversion he had himself seen Christ in this new and glorious body. As he is the Lord of glory, so all that pertains to him is glorious—his Kingdom, his church, his gospel, his covenant. Believers live in the hope of the glory which will be revealed in them, and dwells in them already, a hidden possession. Paul contrasts the glory of Christ with that of Moses, who

³² Phil. 3:21.

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had likewise, in his measure, reflected the light of God.³³ But in Moses the glory was evanescent. Although he was obliged to veil his face, lest the people might be dazzled with the splendour, yet it presently faded away. In Christ the glory is permanent, and his people are able to behold it with open face, and in beholding are themselves changed into the same glory. This conception of the glory revealed in Christ takes the place, in some respects, of the Synoptic idea of the Kingdom. Where Jesus looks forward to the Kingdom of God, Paul sees Jesus himself as manifesting the divine. Through him men have the vision of God and of the world in which God reigns. In his face they behold the glory.

Perhaps it was the greatest of Paul's achievements that he thus found the divine in Jesus. Men had hitherto seen God's glory in the powers of nature, in visitations of angels, in the grand catastrophes and fulfilments of history. Paul discerned it in the life of Jesus, and above all in his Cross. He has taught the world ever since to see here the true manifestation of the divine. Yet we must again remind ourselves that Paul does not think of the divine quality in Jesus as simply identical with his love and goodness. These are indeed the index of it. They are the essential attributes of God, and from their perfect expression in Jesus we are aware that he is of divine nature. But what Paul seeks for, and what he believes he has found in Christ, is the knowledge of God himself. According to the Psalmist the heavens declare the glory of God, and so does the moral law. They are not them-

³³ II Cor. 3:13 *f.*

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selves the glory, but it shines through them from beyond, and is thereby known to us. In like manner Paul understands the revelation in Jesus. It is the moral attributes of Jesus which give him knowledge of God, but he looks not so much to the attributes themselves as to the glory which they make apparent. God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself.

The two ideas of glory and mystery thus merge in one another. In both of them Paul expresses his sense of a higher order over against the visible—a divine order which is hidden from sense and reason and which is yet the ultimately real. He is conscious that this reality has now been revealed in Christ. It is characteristic of Paul that he always thinks of the revelation as active and dynamic. For Gnosis, as for the philosophies which had preceded it, knowledge is an end in itself. Pure contemplation is itself the highest form of activity. Paul maintains that all knowledge is worthless unless it serves a purpose. When he examines the relative values of the spiritual gifts he brings them to the test of utility. However wonderful they may be they can only minister to pride and self-deception unless in some way they are made helpful to the Christian life. He is impatient of the Gnosis, so highly esteemed at Corinth, because it served no purpose but that of intellectual curiosity. Perhaps he was the more severe on this pursuit of knowledge for its own sake because he here recognised his own peculiar temptation. With his restless intelligence he is never content until he has worked his way back to final

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principles, and again and again when he insists that faith is everything he yields to his passion for speculation. Yet he realises the danger to which he thus exposes himself. He is afraid that he may be too much uplifted with the abundance of the light vouchsafed to him, and thanks God for the "thorn in the flesh" which rebukes his satisfaction in mere knowledge.³⁴

✓ So in Paul the idea of revelation is always connected with that of power. This is no doubt due, in some measure, to his sense of the futility of all thinking that does not issue in action. More and more, as he worked in the Greek cities, where brilliant speculation often went hand in hand with moral debasement, he must have grown weary of much that called itself knowledge of God. In all his Epistles he is careful to turn from religious principles to their application in common duties, and tries to make clear that the use of the knowledge is even more important than the knowledge itself. But in his insistence that revelation is power there is certainly much more than this anxiety of an earnest teacher that men should act on what they know. He is convinced that if they receive the revelation they cannot choose but act on it. By its own nature it is a new energy which takes possession of the soul. Along with the knowledge there is given the thing known; something of the divine life is imparted. So while Paul speaks of knowing the love of God he can also say "the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts." By revealing to us the love of God Christ has bestowed it on us and made it operative. It has often been objected

³⁴ II Cor. 12:7.

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to Paul that he says so little of the teaching of Jesus. One would hardly guess from all his many references to the work of Christ that it had consisted, for much the greater part, in patient instruction as to the true nature of righteousness. Did Paul know nothing of this teaching of Jesus? Did he regard it as quite secondary and unimportant? The answer is that for Paul there was no distinction between the teaching work of Christ and his work for man's salvation. In Christ we have the knowledge of God, and with this knowledge is given us the righteousness of God. All that Jesus said to men merges in what he did for them, and his word and action were ultimately the same.

With Paul, therefore, revelation is inseparable from life. He speaks of Christ sometimes as the Revealer, sometimes as the Life-giver; and the two conceptions belong to each other. Through Christ we have the knowledge of God, and thereby the divine life possesses us. Through Christ we receive a new life, and the life brings with it the true knowledge. For in the revelation God himself lays hold of us. "We know God, or rather are known of God."

CHAPTER VII

THE CONDITIONS OF REVELATION

It is taken for granted in the New Testament that man cannot of himself know God. Before God can be known he must come to man, breaking through the barrier which divides the lower world from the higher. How is man capable of receiving this revelation? Since he is limited by his nature to the sphere of the earthly and visible, how can he respond to God?

In the Old Testament this question is hardly raised. It is assumed that when God desires to communicate with men he employs some agency by which he can impress himself on human sense. He speaks to men in dreams or by angelic messengers, who change themselves at will into the appearance of men. With the prophets the idea of vision is connected with that of ecstasy, in which the spirit is detached from the body, and rises into the invisible world. Even in the later time, when prophecy had ceased to be associated with literal trance, there still remained the belief that the prophet was in some manner caught out of himself. In his normal condition man was bound to the present and visible. He must be set free, and exercise a different kind of sight and hearing, before he could receive messages from God.

We hear little in the Gospels as to the manner in which revelation came to Jesus. Sometimes his experience is described in language suggested by the Old Testament. He

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sees the heavens opened; he has intercourse with angels; he hears mysterious voices. These accounts may possibly run back to genuine tradition, but whatever may be the facts which underlie them they bear on their face the marks of later fancy. The apocryphal history of Jesus consists of little else than those marvellous experiences, and it is remarkable that they find so little place in the authentic Gospels. There is no example whatever of Jesus communing with God in a dream. For the ancient mind this was almost the normal mode of revelation, and it plays a considerable part even in the life of Paul. Evidently it was realised from the first that the knowledge of Jesus was different in kind from that of the ordinary seer or enthusiast.

The evangelists assume that he knew the will of God by an immediate insight, which did not come to him at rare, inspired moments, but was inseparable from the action of his own mind. He is confident always that his "I say unto you" corresponds with the will of God. From the outset there seem to have been various surmises as to how he possessed this insight. Perhaps we are to find the earliest of these in the belief that the Spirit descended on him at his Baptism and continued to rest on him. Henceforth he was illuminated, as the prophet had foretold,¹ by the Spirit sent forth from God. This supernatural endowment was gradually pushed back from the time of his Baptism to his birth, or before it. He was one with the principle of Wisdom; he had pre-existed in heaven as the Messiah. Finally, in the Gentile world he was identified

¹ Isaiah 11:2.

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with the Logos which had dwelt from the beginning within the being of God. It is on this ground that the author of Hebrews attributes to him the perfect revelation. "God, who spoke to our fathers in manifold fragments and symbols, has in these last days spoken to us in his Son."² The Fourth Evangelist adopts this doctrine as the very foundation of his Gospel. "No man has seen God at any time; the only-begotten Son, who was in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him."³

Jesus himself never attempts, in the Synoptic teaching, to explain his unique knowledge. He accepts it as a self-evident fact, and does not enquire how it has come to him or how it may be authenticated. One saying has been preserved which stands alone in the Synoptic record: "All things have been delivered unto me of my Father; and no man knoweth the Son but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father save the Son, and he to whom the Son will reveal him."⁴ It is difficult to believe that Jesus expressed himself in language which so obviously reflects the later theological mode of thought; but in substance the verse is fully in keeping with what we feel everywhere to be his attitude. He is conscious of a relation to God so intimate and complete that he can only describe it as that of a son to a father. In virtue of this relation he has an immediate knowledge of God, such as no other teacher had possessed.

Jesus says nothing as to how his own knowledge had come to him. It was so immediate and spontaneous that he probably never thought of explaining it. Yet he speaks

² Heb. 1:1.

³ John 1:18.

⁴ Matt. 11:27. Cf. Luke 10:22.

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repeatedly of the conditions on which his message may be received by others; this, indeed, is one of the main themes of his teaching. What he demands, above all, is a certain moral temper. Men are to lay aside all pride, all confidence in their own wisdom, and to wait on God in a purely receptive spirit, like little children. That which is hidden from the wise and prudent will be revealed to babes.⁵ There is nothing theological in this and similar sayings, but we can discern in them several great ideas which were later to be expressed in doctrinal language as fundamental to the Christian faith. (1) It is recognised, in the first place, that the higher knowledge is different in kind from ordinary knowledge. Occupied, as it is, with another realm of things, it arrives at judgments which are often the very opposite to those which are commonly accepted. It proceeds by methods which are not those of logic and calculation. It calls for perceptions which are not of an intellectual nature, and which are often blunted as the faculties of reason become more acute. (2) Again, the chief condition of this higher knowledge is self-surrender. Man is to recognise that he cannot of himself find God, and that God must come to him. His mood, therefore, must be one of simple waiting upon God. When he has escaped from his doubts and prejudices and anxious thinking the knowledge of God is given to him, he cannot tell how. Jesus here applies in the religious sphere a truth which holds good with regard to all man's higher experiences. We are surrounded with great influences which must be allowed their own way with us, and which

⁵ Matt. 11:26.

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act on us most powerfully when we are least thinking of them. The man who is always seeking for happiness, human sympathy, impressions of beauty, the deeper wisdom of life, will never find them. His busy self-consciousness defeats its own purpose. There is no way of obtaining those great gifts except to stand aside and leave nature and life to communicate their own secrets. So in the quest for God we shut him out by the effort to apprehend him for ourselves. He must come to us. He is near us and around us, and we must be content to wait on him till he reveals himself. (3) Once more, Jesus declares that the knowledge of God is morally conditioned. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." Since the nature of God is one of righteousness he can say nothing to those who are out of harmony with his moral will. Obedience is the one thing needful for any true knowledge of God, and it must be an active obedience. Those who are seeking in their own lives to perform God's will are to that extent one with God. They are making their life like a fragment of his eternal life, and he can therefore hold fellowship with them and reveal himself. This is the motive which gives meaning and significance to all the ethical teaching of Jesus. He guides men to right action, not for its own sake, but as the necessary means for knowing God. His thought is always "that ye may become children of your Father who is in heaven." By doing the will of God men grow like him in nature—they are so related to him that he can make himself known.

In the light of those ideas of Jesus we must understand

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Paul's answer to the question, which he perceived from the first to be a central one, "how can men receive the revelation offered to them in the gospel?" Paul expresses himself in terms of a peculiar theology which seems, at first sight, to have little in common with the teaching of Jesus; but the difference, when we examine it, is one of statement more than of fact. Jesus and Paul are both thinking of the same experience and are trying to describe it. Jesus employs a simple and direct language. Paul is a trained Rabbi, and is also a psychologist, who is not content merely to observe results but seeks to interpret the process. His interpretation may be open to question, but he is concerned with religious facts, which were essentially the same as those perceived by Jesus.

There is indeed one difference which might seem to be all-important. Jesus enquires how men may know God; for Paul the question is how God is known through Christ. It has often been remarked that in the Synoptic teaching Jesus takes for granted that all men have access to God as he himself has. He does not say that he is himself the necessary mediator, apart from whom God cannot be known. Are we not therefore to regard the later Christian construction as needless and artificial? Jesus never called for faith in himself; he would have condemned the religion in which he was interposed, as a sort of barrier, against man's free communion with the Father. It may be answered, however, that although he does not speak explicitly of his own place in the revelation, he pre-supposes it. He believed that to him had been given a unique knowledge of God, and it was in the strength of that

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belief that he came forward with his message. He believed, too, that while all earnest and sincere men had access to God, yet none had apprehended the God whom he himself knew—the God who was merciful and forgiving, and who cared individually for all human souls. This God was now revealed through him for the first time, and it was necessary that men should enter into his own mind and spirit before they could receive the revelation. Although Jesus never said this, in so many words, he was always saying it. Nothing in his teaching or action is intelligible unless we read in the constant factor of his personality. This was at once realised when his disciples set themselves, after his death, to follow that way which they had learned from Jesus. They found that before they could do so they must supply the place of Jesus himself. He must again, in some manner, become present to them before they could know God.

Paul was the first to grasp this truth in its full significance. His intense devotion to Christ has sometimes been explained as an accident, due to the peculiar nature of his conversion. In that moment of spiritual crisis he believed that he had seen the glorified Christ, and his religion was henceforth conditioned by that vision. The thought of God became inseparable in his mind from that of Christ. He was convinced that in Christ alone God was revealed, and the one aim of his thinking was to prove the necessity of that revelation. But it was no accident that Paul's conversion had come about through a vision of Christ. Without that vision, as he was himself aware, he could never have known God. Ever and again,

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in the course of his writings, he looks back on his earlier religion and confesses that it had failed of its purpose. No light could ever have dawned on him except through Christ. So the question "how is God known?" could not but resolve itself for Paul into the other question, "how does Christ impart the knowledge of God?" There were a thousand ways in which God had drawn near to men and in some dim and partial manner revealed himself; but the true knowledge had been granted only in one way. How were men to respond to this new revelation? How could they so know Christ that in him they could apprehend God?

At a later time the doctrine was established that in Christ God had appeared in the flesh in order to make himself accessible to fleshly men. Since we can have no knowledge except through the senses the divine nature assumed a sensible form, adapting itself thus to our human apprehension. This is the idea which underlies the traditional doctrine of the Incarnation, and we find it already set forth in the Fourth Gospel. It also underlies that modern emphasis on the historical Jesus, which is often supposed to have overthrown the traditional doctrine. Here also it is assumed that in the life of Jesus God became knowable. What had hitherto been remote and impalpable was made real. God himself is hidden, but we can understand that Son of man, who was our friend and brother, and when we know him we know the mind of God. Paul, however, could not rest satisfied with a position of this kind. He could not but ask himself, "how

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were men to know the divine, even when it came to them in human form?" The problem which the Incarnation is supposed to solve remained for Paul as great as ever, or even more so. He was faced by the fact that although Christ had appeared in the flesh men had not recognised God in him; on the contrary they had rejected him and put him to death. In his work as a missionary Paul had learned, only too well, that while all men professed some knowledge of God few of them were able to know him in Christ. For that part, he had himself been blind to the revelation. Although he believed in God and was zealously seeking for him, he would never have recognised him in Jesus had it not been for that light in heaven by which his eyes had been suddenly opened. So for Paul the Incarnation had not, in itself, brought God within the reach of men. He deemed it vain to imagine that God can manifest himself in any form under which man, by his natural faculties, can know him. The difficulty consists in apprehending the divine. Whether it is enthroned in inaccessible heavens or becomes flesh and tabernacles with men on earth, it is the divine, and is thereby hidden from human sense. The natural man receiveth not the things of God, for they are foolishness unto him.

It is for this reason that Paul finally rejects Gnosis as a means for discerning God. He was pre-disposed to this mode of thought, alike by his Hellenistic training and his own temperament. He was capable in a rare degree of the mystical mood and was subject to ecstatic experiences. We cannot imagine that if he had not become a Christian he would ever have developed into a Rabbi of

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the orthodox type. His mind was not shaped that way, and Jewish scholars have generally condemned his experiments in Rabbinical logic as clumsy and puerile. Under any conditions he would certainly have been a great religious thinker, but his thought would most naturally have followed the line of Philo and Hellenistic Gnosis. Even as a Christian he could not restrain this speculative impulse. He valued Gnosis, and sought to use it as an instrument for the interpretation of the gospel. None the less, he was conscious of its inadequacy and its positive danger. He saw clearly that its methods, in the last resort, were intellectual. Not only did it hold aloof from those moral activities which were essential to Christian knowledge, but while it professed to transcend reason it remained a form of reason. It assumed that in the quest for God man must himself take the initiative, and thus ministered to the self-sufficiency which excludes knowledge of God. He refuses therefore to allow it more than a subordinate place, though he is never quite sure of its true function. Sometimes he would discard it altogether. Sometimes he declares that it is necessary for exploring the hidden import of Christian truth. To this uncertain attitude towards Gnosis some of the chief difficulties in Paul's teaching are due. Ever and again he tends to confuse the truth revealed in Christ with mystical ideas and fancies which he would possibly have condemned if they had been suggested by others. We have constantly to allow for an alien element which keeps intruding, in spite of himself, into the purest utterances of his religion.

Paul takes his stand, then, on the conviction that the

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gospel has been given directly by God, and that man himself could never have surmised it. Our own faculties must stand aside, and we must put ourselves into the attitude of simply receiving from God. He therefore rests the Christian life on faith. That which makes it possible for man to obtain knowledge of God is nothing else than the capacity for faith. What faith in itself consists in Paul never defines. He found the word already established as the watch-word of the church, and from the first it had implied much more than a bare assent to a given affirmation. To "believe" in Jesus involved an acceptance of his teaching and way of life. It meant a confidence in his promise of the Kingdom of God and a submission to him which was expressed in the confession "Jesus is Lord." In one place Paul identifies faith with the belief in Christ effected by missionary preaching;⁶ but he is careful to point out, in the same chapter, that many who hear the message reject it as incredible. The people of Israel, who might have been expected to welcome it most eagerly, have been the last to respond to it. For the faith which believes the gospel is not an act of the mind. It cannot be brought about by argument and persuasion. The gospel is God's word to men, and none can receive it except those who can hear God's voice. The gospel for them will carry its own evidence. They accept by faith what God has revealed.

Paul therefore thinks of faith as that in man which answers to the grace of God. Of his own free goodness God

⁶ Romans 10:17.

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gives to man, and man receives, without question, that which is given. There must be no demand for proof, no doubt as to God's purpose, no fear of one's own unworthiness. All is offered as a gift, and faith consists in the frank acceptance of the divine gift. Paul sees this gift in the Cross of Christ. He might seem, at times, to leave out of sight all other elements of the gospel, reducing it to the one fact that Christ died for us. It must be remembered, however, that he viewed the Cross in the whole light of Jesus' life and message. It gathered up for him, as in one burning focus, all the meaning of the work of Christ. Not only so, but he saw in it the supreme expression of God's own nature. Christ had appeared that he might make known to us the love of God, and this was manifested in the Cross. The faith which is directed towards it is nothing else than faith in God himself. He is revealed to us in the death of Christ as the God of grace, and along with his gift we accept his revelation.

Paul does not attempt to analyse faith, or to relate it to any known faculty in man's nature. It is somewhat strange that he never connects it, at least explicitly, with that inner light of which he speaks in the opening chapters of Romans. Later in the Epistle⁷ he does indeed suggest that faith springs out of that "inward man" which, in spite of all moral impotence, delights in the law of God. Man is made in God's image; somewhere in his nature there is an inherent sense of God, which answers when God speaks to him. Paul is anxious, however, to

⁷ Most notably in chap. 7.

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avoid all language which might imply that faith is some kind of knowledge—even of the deeper, intuitive knowledge. God's message is given to us, and we must receive it simply as it is given, with an absolute trust and surrender. The classic example of faith is Abraham, who accepted the promise because God made it. "He believed as before God, who quickeneth the dead and calleth those things which be not as though they were. Against hope he believed in hope, and conquering weakness by faith he considered his own body now as good as dead; he staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strong in faith, giving glory to God."⁸ Faith consists in this entire submission. God gives, and man responds to him with a perfect willingness to receive.

In his own manner, therefore, Paul repeats the thought of Jesus, that to enter the Kingdom men must become like little children. They must utterly forget themselves; they must open their hearts to God and receive what he gives them, even when it seems to the natural man to be foolishness. This has often been taken in the sense that men must discard their reason and build their religion wholly on some bare word of authority. Down to our own days we are wont to speak of the conflict between reason and faith. This conception, however, is quite foreign to the thought of Paul. He places no embargo on reason; he does not think of reason and faith as in conflict. Where the later church declared that reason must not he says that it *cannot* explain the things of God. It is

⁸ Romans 4:17 f.

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free to search into them as it will, and Paul himself is one of the most fearless of thinkers. He tries to understand his beliefs, and sometimes pushes his speculation to the verge of the fantastic. The restraints of later orthodoxy do not exist for him, and he does not dream of imposing them on others. Why should the mind be fettered, since it is not to the mind that God offers his message? A faith that must make terms with reason, or support itself by reason, is to Paul meaningless. The message must be accepted not because it is reasonable but simply because it comes direct from God.

Faith, then, is the one condition on which men can apprehend the gospel. "Therein is the righteousness of God revealed, from faith to faith."⁹ It is to be noted that in this cardinal statement the emphasis is on the word "revealed." God's redeeming purpose is not something to be painfully discovered, by the effort of man's own thought. In that way it could never be known, or even surmised, for God acts on a level which is beyond the reach of human discernment. If God is to be known it must be by revelation on the part of God; and since the truth is thus given the whole process of receiving it must be one of faith. This alone can answer to revelation.

Faith is thus the organ of Christian knowledge, and Paul sees it active in every direction. By faith we can endure all troubles, confident in God's presence and help. By faith we perceive the will of God, and can choose the

⁹ Romans 1:17.

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right line of action in all moral perplexities, so that "whatever is not of faith is sin."¹⁰ By faith we are aware of the higher world to which we are destined; we can hold inward fellowship with Christ; we can be certain of God's promises; we can rise above all temptations and overcome the fear of death. The whole Christian life is one of faith, inasmuch as it is inspired by motives which lie outside of the visible world. As faith is the spring of all Christian action Paul would also make it the ground of Christian thinking. He assumes that in his own interpretation of the gospel he is presenting what has been given him not by knowledge but by faith. It cannot be denied that in this way he falls into a confusion of thought which has often repeated itself in the time since. Again and again he gives out as revelation what is demonstrably due to his own conjecture or reflection. At the root, no doubt, of all his doctrines there is a truth given by faith; but we need always to distinguish between this truth and the conclusions which he rests on it. Often the distinction is hard to draw, but broadly speaking it may be said that the revelation given to Paul is confined to the great simple truths of his gospel. Through Christ he had become aware of the redeeming will of God. He was conscious of a power from beyond the world which had now entered the world for man's salvation. In truths like these we must look for the revelation made to Paul, and he rightly claims that it cannot be challenged. "He that is spiritual judgeth all things, but he himself is judged of no man."¹¹ But in his doctrinal system Paul is on different

¹⁰ Romans 14:23.

¹¹ I Cor. 2:15.

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ground. His thought is the product of his own thinking, and must be judged by the same standards as all other thought.

Paul's conception of faith is inseparably bound up with his other conception of the Spirit. Often in the same breath he passes from one to the other. The message of God is received by faith; it comes also through the Spirit, and is known by those who possess the Spirit. "We have received the Spirit which is of God, that we may know the things which are freely given to us by God."¹² What is the relation between these twin conceptions of faith and the Spirit?

It must never be forgotten that the idea of the Spirit was in itself a part of Paul's inheritance. He makes it his own and endues it with a new and profound significance, but he had no choice but to accept it, as one of the normal Christian beliefs. Largely for this reason it tends to overlap with his more individual doctrines, or simply to repeat them in a somewhat different form. He finds it hard, for instance, to distinguish between the work of the Spirit and that of the indwelling Christ. Almost all the functions which he ascribes to the Spirit he has already assigned to Christ himself, with whom the believer is mystically united; and he is finally driven to admit that Christ and the Spirit are identical.¹³ In a similar manner he fails to make a clear distinction between faith and the Spirit. He thinks now of one and now of the other as the means by which God's message is apprehended. He declares that

¹² I Cor. 2:12.

¹³ II Cor. 3:17.

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both are necessary, and yet it is sometimes difficult to see how they co-operate, or why the one should require the other. We cannot but feel that if the doctrine of the Spirit had not been imposed on Paul, as a standard Christian belief, he would have been able to dispense with it. To be sure he turns it to marvellous purpose, and through him it has become one of the most fruitful and far-reaching of all Christian conceptions; but he gives it this new wealth of meaning by simply transferring to it ideas which he had already expressed in other terms.

The conception itself runs back to the very earliest phase of Old Testament thought, and has its roots in primitive religion. It arose from the effort to explain a fact which had always impressed men as mysterious. Why is it that a man seems at times to be lifted out of himself and to perform actions which he would normally have found impossible? Why does a new personality appear to emerge suddenly out of the familiar one? This was accounted for, in primitive thought, by the assumption that an invisible power has for the moment taken possession of the man. This "breath" or "Spirit" was at first regarded as self-acting and irresponsible, but with the advance of monotheism it was related to God. It became the Spirit of God, sent forth by God to effect his purpose. From the outset the Spirit was peculiarly associated with prophecy, perhaps because the seer gave out his oracles in a state of frenzy, and this strange physical condition was attributed to a power which had entered into him. In the later phase of prophecy this belief persisted, but in a sublimated form. The action of the Spirit was perceived,

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not in any outward behaviour, but in the illumination which enabled a prophet to frame his message. A divine impulse was working in him, in virtue of which he could see what was hidden from the eye of sense. Thus in the Old Testament the Spirit is closely connected with revelation. All supernatural insight is due to the action of the Spirit, and it is believed that the Messiah, when he appears, will be supremely gifted with this revealing power. "The Spirit of the Lord will rest upon him—the Spirit of wisdom and knowledge, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and of fear of the Lord."¹⁴ All God's servants, according to the prophet Joel, will in the last days be endued with the Spirit.¹⁵ The prayer of Moses will be fulfilled that God's people might all be prophets and that God might put his Spirit upon them.¹⁶

It was apparently this prophecy of Joel which led to a revival of the conception of the Spirit in the primitive church. From the day of Pentecost onwards the disciples were filled with a high enthusiasm, which had its outcome in speaking with tongues, prophecy, new capacities for action and utterance. What was the cause of these seemingly supernatural gifts? There appeared to be only one explanation. The Spirit which was to be poured out in the last days had now been bestowed. It had descended on Christ's followers, who were thus marked out as the people chosen by God. Henceforth it was believed that the Spirit dwelt in the church, that all converts received it at baptism, that it manifested itself in diverse gifts and in varying degrees. Through the Spirit Christ was still

¹⁴ Isaiah 11:2.

¹⁵ Joel 2:28, 29.

¹⁶ Num. 11:29.

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present with his disciples, and was speaking to them of that higher world into which he had ascended.

Paul took up this conception and made it the vehicle for his own teaching. For him, as for the church generally, the Spirit was a supernatural power, entering into human life; but he thought of it as an abiding possession, not as working intermittently in strange phenomena. Through Christ the believer had undergone a radical change; he belonged to a different world and was controlled by new impulses and motives. Paul expressed all this by saying that instead of a fleshly he had become a spiritual man. His life had been leavened and transformed by the divine Spirit.

Paul seems at times to conceive of the Spirit almost materially, as a kind of ethereal substance which fuses itself with the earthly nature and transmutes it. He describes it as in some manner conveyed in the water of baptism, so that by the outward rite the believer is at the same time "drenched with the Spirit."¹⁷ It is more than possible that Paul was affected by that ancient mode of thought which is still recalled to us by our word "influence." All transformations were supposed to be due to some actual contact—to the flowing in of one essence into another. But Paul's conception of the Spirit, in whatever form he envisaged it, is that of a power issuing from God and operating in the life of man. It is at once an active and an illuminating power. Through the Spirit man's nature is changed, in its very principle, into something different. Through the Spirit, likewise, man becomes

¹⁷ I Cor. 12:13.

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capable of a higher knowledge; he apprehends the deep things of God; he obtains the vision of the future and unseen. This twofold function of the Spirit is involved in Paul's idea of revelation as dynamic. The knowledge of God carries with it a living energy, so that in the act of knowing God his power takes possession of us. The Spirit which enlightens is at the same time life-giving.

Paul conceives of the Spirit, therefore, as the medium of revelation. Things that are unutterable are communicated by the Spirit. By means of it God imparts to us that knowledge to which of ourselves we could never attain. But the Spirit which conveys revelation is also the power which responds to it. "The natural man cannot receive the things of God."¹⁸ He has no faculty of his own by which he can grasp them, and they seem foolish to him or non-existent. God himself creates in us the power of knowing him. He bestows on us his Spirit, which changes the earthly nature and makes us capable of the higher knowledge. Another sense is born in us whereby we recognise God and say to him "Abba, Father."¹⁹

Thus in the most drastic manner Paul solves his problem of how man can receive the revelation. Since the higher world is utterly beyond man's comprehension, how can he attain to it? How can any revelation avail us since we have no capacity for the knowledge of God? Paul answers that along with the revelation God gives us the capacity. His Spirit enters into our hearts, and thereby we understand the message which the Spirit brings. It may be objected that in this way the difficulty is not

¹⁸ I Cor. 2:14.

¹⁹ Romans 8:15. Gal. 4:6.

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answered, but is only pushed further back. If man has no capacity for the divine, how can he receive the Spirit? It is not enough to say with Paul that the nature is changed, for just as in chemistry there can be no change unless some element is already present to which the new element is allied, and with which it can blend. Paul is not blind to this difficulty, and behind all his thought we have to allow for the assumption that man is made in God's image. The new creation is more properly a restoration. According to a curious belief, probably of Rabbinical origin, Paul several times speaks of Christ as the heavenly man—the prototype after whom man was fashioned in imperfect earthly material.²⁰ By union with Christ man is conformed to his true pattern; as in Adam he died, so in Christ he is made alive. Thus while the Spirit comes to us from beyond it does not come as something alien. It bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God. It reminds us of a lost birth-right, and enables us to regain it. This idea lies always in the background of Paul's thinking, and without it his whole doctrine of the new life would be inexplicable.

At the same time when he maintains that the Spirit creates in us the power to know God, Paul is seeking to affirm, with the utmost emphasis, his primary idea of the gospel as a revelation. Man does not know the truth but has it made known to him. The work is so entirely of the grace of God that only through his Spirit, which brings us the message, do we have the capacity to receive the message. Paul's thought may seem nothing but a

²⁰ I Cor. 15:45 *f.* Col. 3:10. Romans 5:14 *f.*

paradox, and yet he is only applying, in its largest extent, a principle which is familiar. It happens almost always that the man of original mind is neglected in his lifetime. He communicates some new truth in science or philosophy, but it is not intelligible until he has changed the mental outlook of his generation. He is a great poet or painter, but must himself create the perceptions which will recognise his work as beautiful. For that part the meaning of Paul's principle was demonstrated historically by the world's reception of the Christian message. It was only in the course of centuries that the worth of the new religion made itself apparent. For a long time not only the multitude but the best minds of Paganism rejected the Christian ideals, and saw nothing in Jesus himself but a perverter of mankind. Before he could be understood he had himself to form in men the true standards of value. In the language of Paul, he required first to bestow the Spirit, by which the spiritual message could be received.

How is it, then, that Paul's doctrine of the Spirit is related to his conception of faith? It might appear as if he assumed two different modes of apprehending the revelation. On the one hand, there is a power in man himself which enables him to receive from God. Although the divine purposes are hidden from sense and reason they are revealed to faith—to that mood of trust and receptivity in which the man becomes like a little child. On the other hand, there is a power which is not man's own but comes to him as a gift. Through the Spirit which God imparts to him he has knowledge of the

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things of God. Paul might seem to vacillate between these two views. While he declares that only faith is necessary to receive the message, he hastens to add that the Spirit also is necessary. Sometimes he assumes that faith must precede the Spirit, which can only enter into those who have been baptised on the ground of faith. Elsewhere he would appear to say that faith is consequent on the gift of the Spirit, and that those only who have been transformed by God's power are capable of saving faith. Perhaps he best expresses his real thought when he speaks of "the Spirit of faith."²¹ As he tries to separate faith and the Spirit he finds that neither of them is prior to the other, and that they blend together in a single conception. It is by faith that we know God, but faith, although it is our most personal act, is not wholly our own. God works in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure.²² We do not know God, but rather are known of him.

Thus between the two ideas of faith and the Spirit there is no ultimate distinction. By means of both of them Paul gives effect to his central thought that the Christian message is a revelation. It comes to us directly from God, and as we could never have discovered it for ourselves, so by no wisdom of our own can we apprehend it when it is given. By faith we receive from God, but since his grace is everything he must somehow create in us even the power to receive. Paul therefore takes up that conception of the Spirit, which had come to him from the primitive church, and fuses it with his own conception of

²¹ II Cor. 4:13.

²² Phil. 2:13.

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faith. He thinks of the Spirit as so working in our hearts that we can wait on God in the trust and self-surrender of faith. Our own act is thus one with God's act. "I could not have found thee," says Augustine, "unless thou hadst first found me." This had also been the experience of Paul, and it had its outcome in that twofold conviction which lies at the heart of all his teaching. God is known by faith and by the Spirit.

CHAPTER VIII

THE JOHANNINE IDEA OF REVELATION

THE Fourth Gospel opens with a Prologue, in which Christ, as he appeared on earth, is identified with the Logos, who had dwelt from all eternity within the being of God. Through the Logos all things had been created, and in every man there was some glimmering of his light. Now he was manifested in human form, and those who believed on him had knowledge of God, and could share in the divine life. It is only in the Prologue that these ideas are explicitly set forth, but they supply the constant background to the narrative which follows.

At first sight it might appear as if the evangelist had broken entirely with the teaching of the previous Gospels, and even with that of Paul. He does indeed mark a new departure, in so far as he works with metaphysical conceptions, borrowed through Philo of Alexandria from Greek speculation. Yet he only expresses in more definite and intelligible terms what had always been the guiding principle in the Christian faith. From the outset believers had seen in Christ the revelation of God. Conscious that God could not be known unless he revealed himself, they held that in Christ he had come to them, across the chasm which divides the lower world from the higher. At the heart of the Christian message there had always been this belief that God had at last spoken through

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Christ. The aim of the Fourth Evangelist is to develop this belief and supply it with a sure basis. He declares that Christ spoke for God because he was himself divine—the Word made flesh.

Christian thought had hitherto been moulded, and in many respects confined, by apocalyptic ideas taken over from Judaism. It was assumed that the Kingdom of God lay in the future, and had been revealed by Christ in so far as he brought the promise and assurance of its coming. Paul himself accepts this apocalyptic view, and chafes continually against its limitations. To a great extent it deprived the work of Christ of reality. Although he had appeared on earth and proclaimed a gospel and chosen a number of men as his followers, the significance of all this was thrown into the future. He would be manifest in his true character hereafter; the import of his message was still hidden; his disciples could only look forward in hope to a complete fellowship with him. We may here perceive the true reason why Paul refused to know Christ after the flesh. It has often been objected that in this way he missed the real significance of Jesus—replacing that knowledge of God which was given in the earthly life with a theological doctrine, concerned with a visionary figure. But the whole aim of Paul when he transferred his faith to the glorified Messiah, was to make it more real. He believed that in Jesus God had revealed himself; and the historical Jesus, viewed in the light of apocalyptic theory, had only revealed him potentially. He became Son of God with power through his Resurrection, but on earth he had been under an eclipse.

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He would return to bring in the Kingdom, but until then the higher order could not be realised. Paul sought to escape from this restriction of the grace of God. He desired to find in Christ the actual revelation—not what lay in the future but what was already given. He therefore turned from the earthly Jesus, still waiting to be glorified, to the Christ who had now entered on his glory, and in whom he could find a present fellowship with God.

The Fourth Evangelist seeks to discover in the earthly life of Jesus what Paul had been compelled to look for in the exalted life. He stands in the succession to Paul, and almost all his doctrines have a Pauline basis, although they are applied with new turns of meaning in new directions. If we assume, as seems most probable, that he belonged to the church at Ephesus, he inherited the Pauline tradition, and perhaps had known Christianity in no other form. Yet while the Christ he knew was the glorified Christ of Paul, he was dissatisfied with Paul's attitude to the historical life. Like Paul he saw in Christ the revelation of the divine, but he refused to make a severance between the life on earth and the life that followed. Christ had become the Son of God with power because he had always been so. It was through the life as they had actually witnessed it that men could interpret the life as it now was. Paul had called in the exalted Christ to explain the earthly one. He had failed to apprehend the divine glory in Jesus until his eyes had been opened by the heavenly vision. With the Fourth Evangelist this experience had been reversed. The divine had touched him through the words and actions of Jesus, the love he had

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shown to his disciples, the holiness and majesty which were around him as he mingled with men. Like Paul, the evangelist knew the exalted Christ who was still present with his people, doing greater works and revealing himself more grandly. But he was conscious that apart from the earthly Jesus this heavenly Lord could be nothing to him but a vague spiritual power. All that Christ had done afterwards or had taught through the Spirit, had to be understood from his life on earth. The Fourth Gospel is written in order to bring home and to illustrate this truth. It seeks to impress on us that the actual life of Jesus had a supreme and enduring value. Though it lasted for a brief time, and was witnessed only by a few in a remote country, yet we must ever go back to it and ponder its significance. It was the key to all that happened in the later history and to all that we know by inward experience. In that life of Jesus God made his revelation.

There is good reason to believe that the evangelist was led by a special circumstance to throw this emphasis on the historical life. If the First Epistle is by the author of the Gospel (and of this there is little legitimate doubt), he was confronted with the heresy which denied that Christ had come in the flesh. Since the divine is of a different order from the earthly an incarnation was, in the nature of things, impossible. The Son of God could only appear to be man; what seemed to be his human body was a phantom or illusion. It is shown in the Epistle that a doctrine like this must empty the Christian revela-

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tion of all its meaning. What Christ gave to us was the assurance that the divine had penetrated into the lower world; God was no longer distant and inaccessible but had come within the reach of men. If Christ had not truly appeared on earth, then there was no revelation. The divine and the human were still separated by an impassable gulf. So when the great thesis is laid down in the Gospel, "The Word was made flesh," the emphasis is not to be placed, as it has usually been, on the thought that Christ, although he became man, was the eternal Word. It lies rather on the fact that he was made flesh. Although he was divine he was yet truly man. Nothing could be further from the truth than the assertion so often made that in the Fourth Gospel the real Jesus disappears, and gives place to an imaginary being—a divinity disguised for a brief time in human form. It was for the very purpose of refuting such a doctrine that John wrote his Gospel.

He maintains, then, that in Jesus as he appeared on earth we have the revelation. The Logos which had been with God from the beginning was made visible. This work of Christ as the Revealer is expressed in the two terms Light and Life, which are so closely related in the Gospel as to be almost interchangeable. Christ was the Life-giver, and was also the Light of the world. "In him was life, and the life was the light of men."¹ The meaning is that in Christ as the Logos there resided a divine life, different in quality from the life of men. In virtue of this life that was in him he brought illumination.

¹ John 1:4.

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Several suggestions are combined in this verse—all of them essential to the Johannine doctrine of revelation. (1) In the first place it is implied that the knowledge of God is given directly and, as it were, palpably. "The life was the light." It has often been remarked that in the Fourth Gospel there is little or no teaching. Many words are spoken by Jesus, but they all have for their purpose the significance of his own Person. They stand in the place of gestures in which he points to himself. The evangelist is always insisting on the value of these words of Jesus, and yet we cannot but ask "what do they teach us?" Do we not learn more about the nature of God from a single Synoptic parable than from all those discourses in the Fourth Gospel which simply reiterate in varying phrase that by believing in Jesus men can lay hold of God? This, however, belongs to the whole intention of the Gospel. Jesus' true teaching consisted in his offering himself to men in his living Person. "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father."² The knowledge of God cannot be taught. It is given in that contact with God which has been made possible through Christ. The life was the light of men.

(2) Again, these words give vivid expression to the idea, everywhere present in the New Testament, that revelation is dynamic. Knowledge of God is no mere intellectual enlightenment but carries with it a divine energy. As the evangelist declares elsewhere, "This is life eternal, to know thee and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent."³ It is only the other side of the same thought when

² John 14:9.

³ John 17:3.

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he says in the Prologue, "the life was the light." To share in the eternal life imparted in Christ is the true knowledge; for the life and the light are inseparable, and no one can tell which of them creates the other. By knowing God we share in his life; by sharing in his life we know him. Christ came to men both as revealer and life-giver; but while we may think of him under one or the other of these aspects we must never forget that they are essentially one and the same.

(3) Once more, an answer is suggested to the question as to how men are able to receive the revelation which is given through Christ. We have seen that Paul solves this problem by his doctrine of faith and the Spirit, but does not explain how men are capable of the response of faith. The Fourth Evangelist, by means of his Logos conception, supplies the factor which is missing. Through the Logos God created the world and the souls of men, so that in men the divine life is obscurely present and answers to the revelation made in Christ. There is reason to believe that in our ordinary texts the crucial verses are wrongly punctuated, and ought to be read as they appear in certain ancient Fathers:⁴ "All things were made through him, and apart from him nothing was made. What was made in him was life,⁵ and the life was the light of men; and the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overpower it." Created through the Logos all things, in

⁴ Practically all Fathers before the fourth century agree on this reading—the other came in, according to Chrysostom, as a safe-guard against the view that the Holy Spirit was created. All things were made through the Logos—but only such things as were made.

⁵ The meaning is well expressed in Bacon's translation (*The Gospel of the Hellenists*, p. 243). "Through him the creation was infused with life."

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their degree, were touched with that divine life which was also light. Although it was buried in alien substance the light was never wholly extinguished. So before appearing in Christ the Logos was already the light that illumines every man. Christ came "to his own"—to those in whose very nature was the premonition of him. Most of them were blind, but there were still the few who by the light within them could respond to the light when it was manifested in the world.

When we thus understand the sequence of thought in the Prologue we can see that the evangelist is seeking, at the very outset, to remove the difficulty which is involved in his doctrine of revelation. Since the divine and the earthly are utterly apart, how could God make himself known to men? How could men respond to him when he spoke? It is the problem which meets us, under many forms, in all theories of revelation, and John's Logos solution of it is by no means adequate to his purpose, and involves him, as he proceeds, in many perplexities. Yet the idea expressed in it is one which, in substance, we must always fall back upon. Man recognises the divine because he is conscious of that in himself which is allied to it. In his own deepest being he belongs to the world out of which the revelation comes, and the light in himself welcomes the light.

In what sense was Christ the Revealer? It is apparent as we study the Fourth Gospel that the writer moves in two different fields of thought, which he never quite succeeds in bringing together. On the one hand he is a

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Hellenistic thinker, strongly affected by the prevailing Gnosis. He thinks of God as the absolute Being, who is in himself unknowable. But as mind projects itself in the uttered word, so God is manifested in the Logos, which proceeds from him and shares in his self-existent life. In Christ the Logos has appeared in this lower world, and through him we apprehend the divine nature. In the knowledge of Christ we know God; by union with Christ we have part in the eternal life. On the other hand, the evangelist takes his stand on the primitive Christian tradition, and in the name of it protests against the conclusions of Gnosis. He has pondered the records of the life of Jesus, and in his own inward experience has held fellowship with Jesus, and through him has found God. On this side of his thought he does not conceive of Christ as the metaphysical Logos, who partakes of the divine essence. He sees in him the perfect embodiment of the will of God, who made real to men the divine love and holiness, and enabled them to become sons of God. They obtain the higher knowledge by way of faith and discipleship. "He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me, and I will love him and manifest myself to him." ⁶

The evangelist seeks to reconcile these two positions, and both of them must be taken into account before we can do justice to his idea of revelation. His true interest, undoubtedly, is in the actual life of Jesus. His Gospel takes the form not of an abstract treatise but of a graphic presentation of the life. He feels, to the depth of his

⁶ John 14:21.

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being, that the heretical teachers who would resolve the Christian message into a theosophical myth have left out the very thing which gives it value. In their effort to make it more profound and significant they have emptied it of meaning. There is one scene in the Gospel⁷ in which certain Greeks make the request "We would see Jesus"; and the evangelist thinks of this as the true desire and need of that Greek world for which he writes. He seeks to bring Jesus before us as he lived among men, and his Gospel uplifts and inspires us most when it makes us see Jesus most vividly—meeting with the woman by the well, conversing with his disciples at the Last Supper, facing his tormentors at the trial, carrying his Cross. We are moved by those episodes because the writer himself was. These, after all, were the things that mattered to him. At the heart of his religion there was the vision of Jesus in his own Person as the revelation of God.

The theology, however, has also a real place in John's religion. It has become customary to describe his Gospel as much less a historical record than an interpretation. While a fervent Christian he was a philosophical thinker, searching for the principles behind the facts, and for this purpose he avails himself of the Logos doctrine. By means of it he explains the Christian message to the intellectuals of his day, harmonising it with the conclusions of Greek thought. Instead of saying simply that Jesus revealed God he seeks to understand the process of the revelation, with the result that the Christian history is partly allegorised into a metaphysical system. Now this

⁷ John 12:20 f.

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account of the Gospel is misleading. John does not interpret the message in the sense that he tries consciously to expound the truths of revelation in terms of reason. The title of "the theologian" which has been attached to John's name from an early time⁸ was not meant to place him among the Christian doctors, along with Origen and Anselm and Thomas Aquinas. It implied that he was pre-eminently one whom God had illuminated. What we now regard as his theology was accepted by the early church as supernatural insight into the deeper implications of the message of Christ. This, we may be sure, was the belief of John himself. He speaks out of a knowledge which had come to him through mystical experience. To be sure, he employs terms and ideas which we can now see to have been borrowed from the speculations of his age; but this does not mean that his doctrine of Christ as Logos was the result of conscious study and reflection. We are to think of him rather as so steeped in the Hellenistic ideas that his personal knowledge of God spontaneously clothed itself in those forms. An example might be taken from the saints in the Middle Ages who attained to the beatific vision. It would be easy to show that the vision, as they saw it, was determined for them by their studies in the Bible and apocalyptic, in the creeds as formulated in terms of Aristotle. Are we to say, therefore, that they described as vision what was only current doctrine, based on philosophical concepts which were more than doubtful? No; they had passed through a real

⁸ It is uncertain when this title was first employed; but it can be traced back to the fifth century and may have been earlier.

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experience; a vision had indeed been granted them, although they beheld it under the forms in which they habitually thought and felt. This is no less true of the Fourth Evangelist. What we call his "interpretation" was not a deliberate effort to think out the Christian beliefs in the light of Logos doctrine. The vision of God had come to him under two different aspects—through the life of Jesus and also by way of mystical contemplation. It may be that he had communed with God in a condition of actual trance. Again and again, as in the Prologue itself, he speaks of invisible things with an ardour and directness which do not belong to the language of mere meditation. In any case, his experience as a mystic was no less real than that which had come to him through knowledge of Jesus. It is coloured by his Hellenistic thinking and impresses us now as the outcome of reflection. But his mind was native to that mode of thought which has become strange to us. He could not but employ it when he spoke of what he saw.

The evangelist seeks, therefore, to combine his two experiences, or rather they merge in each other of their own accord. Through Christ he has known God in his grace and truth; and through Christ, too, he has obtained knowledge of the reality which underlies and transcends all existence. This knowledge of which he is conscious is not that of ordinary Gnosis. Philo and his successors ascended by the ladder of reason to a sphere that was beyond reason. John had obtained his insight directly. God, in his eternal being had become present to him in Christ. It is significant that he continually speaks of this

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knowledge of God in the language of *seeing*. "We beheld his glory";⁹ "he that seeth me hath seen the Father";¹⁰ "he that seeth me hath seen him that sent me."¹¹ The idea implied is that of an immediate as opposed to an inferential knowledge. God can now be realised; he has become the object of a positive experience. Thus between the "knowing" of John and that of Hellenistic Gnosis there is a radical difference which he himself is always trying to make apparent. In Gnosis man discovered God by his own effort; the mystical mood was only the final stage of an intellectual process. In the Christian knowledge God himself comes to us through Christ. The evangelist, it has often been noted, strictly avoids the word "Gnosis," though he speaks constantly of the act of "knowing." He would seem in this way to mark his sense of the difference between the philosophical and the Christian attitudes of mind.

He believes, then, that in Christ there has been given a twofold revelation. God is at once the righteous God of whom the prophets had spoken, and the absolute being for whom the Greeks had been seeking, ever since the days of Plato. John declares that in both of these aspects of his nature God has been revealed in Christ. In two direct experiences, both of them equally valid, the two revelations have been vouchsafed to him; and his object in the Gospel is to grasp them as one. They seem to be parallel and apart, but is it not possible to bring them together? Jesus revealed God by his life of love and self-sacrifice. He was also the revelation of divine being.

⁹ John 1:14.

¹⁰ John 14:9.

¹¹ John 12:45.

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It has to be admitted that in this main purpose of his Gospel John is only half-successful. In the effort to present Jesus as in essence one with God he tends to merge the ethical in the metaphysical. We constantly feel that he is in danger of falling himself into an error similar to that of the heretics whom he opposes. The Jesus who shares in the nature of God becomes at times an unreal figure—a divine phantasm who wears only the formal attributes of humanity. He speaks an oracular language. He performs miracles which have no other object than to mark him out as supernatural. He stands aloof from all human passions and infirmities. He does not make petition to God but only communicates his will, assured that it will be granted by the Father, who is one with himself.¹² His life is not beset with trials which fall upon him unawares but all has been planned beforehand, and he only fulfils a part assigned to him. In reading the Synoptic Gospels we are conscious of a divine quality in the human life of Jesus. With John, the divine nature overshadows or suppresses the human. The Word has not truly become flesh.

Again, the message of John, as of other mystical thinkers, tends to be lacking in substance. He finds the higher nature in Jesus, but cannot tell us what it consists in. While it is impressed on us that Jesus reveals God, we learn next to nothing of his revelation. The changes are rung continually on a few abstract ideas. God is above all, he is eternal and omnipresent and all-powerful, the life that dwells in him is different in kind from

¹² John 11:41, 42.

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earthly life. From the Synoptic teaching we derive a full and rich conception of God, beside which the conception in the Fourth Gospel is pale and negative. We have to be content with little more than the repeated assurance that the invisible God has now been revealed.

The truth is that in his effort to present Jesus as the manifestation of divine being, the evangelist, in spite of himself, becomes a metaphysical thinker. He has attained to his conception by a direct experience and not by a rational process, but in the attempt to express it he falls inevitably into a mode of thought which is philosophical rather than religious. The idea of God as absolute being arises, in the last resort, out of an intellectual need. Although it carries us beyond reason, it offers itself as the truth which reason is seeking for. In its Hellenistic form, as we have seen, mysticism was the outcome, and in some respects the culminating phase of Greek philosophy. Certainly no one can deny that Philo and the great Gnostics and Plotinus were men of profoundly religious spirit. We feel as we study them that they had not only thought about God but had met him. They had received a revelation which in its way was no less authentic than that of the prophets or of Paul. Yet they are philosophical thinkers, and it is hardly possible to distinguish in their thinking between mystical vision and intellectual insight. In all times since there has been a similar dubiety. The mystic is conscious of that which is above reason, but tries to bring it within the compass of reason. His thought leaves on our minds the impression of a pseudo-rationality. He covers up what has come to him by way of

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vision with a cloud of would-be philosophical verbiage. To most of the famous mystics we might apply Paul's image of Moses, who reflected on his face the divine light and concealed it under a veil. This is true, in no small measure, of the Fourth Evangelist. His knowledge of God has come to him by revelation, but he wraps it in conceptions which are meant to explain but only obscure it. In the following centuries the Christian message was almost to be forgotten in the barren discussion of purely speculative questions. For the Fourth Evangelist these questions had not yet emerged, and if they had been put to him he would probably have treated them as indifferent. Yet they were all involved in his teaching. When once the attempt was made to combine the faith in Christ with a philosophical theory a confusion was bound to set in between the ideas of religion and those of philosophy.

The evangelist, then, seeks to bring together two modes of revelation which are disparate in their nature. It was possible to think of Christ as manifesting in his holy life the divine love and goodness. It was possible also to think of him as in a metaphysical sense divine—a higher nature had been incarnated in him, so that through him we could directly apprehend the sphere of being which is beyond our knowledge. The difficulty was to identify these two revelations. When Jesus was regarded as the eternal Logos, he could not but lose many of the attributes which gave divine significance to the human personality. John is obliged, for instance, to leave out all reference to

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the Temptation, the Agony, the intercourse of Jesus with publicans and sinners. No action that might suggest human weakness can be ascribed to a divine being. The incidents recorded are all accompanied with some reminder that while he lived as a man Jesus was more than man, and that each word and act had a deeper import. As a result there is an air of unreality about the Gospel. It is John's intention to assert the historical fact of the life of Jesus, but he is compelled, in spite of himself, to dissolve it into a sort of allegory. For he has undertaken an impossible task. Conceiving of Jesus as the Word made flesh he seeks to present him as at once true man and the revelation of divine being. His picture is drawn with marvellous skill, but it fails to carry conviction. The figure which it represents is neither a historical Person nor a divinity.

This failure is ultimately due to the effort to express religious values in terms of philosophical ideas. The effort has been made countless times, and is, indeed, inevitable. As a rational being man must needs try to adjust his faith to his reason. His belief, however it has been apprehended, formulates itself, sooner or later, as a doctrine. For the time being the doctrine seems to elucidate and support the religious truth, but it always proves inadequate. That which is vital has been suppressed, and it finally becomes necessary to break up the rational forms and build afresh on the ground of the actual revelation. John's Logos conception was in many ways wonderfully suited to his purpose. It enabled him to affirm the divine nature of Christ without actually identifying him with

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God. It had grown out of Greek speculation and yet had linked itself through Philo with Old Testament ideas. Moreover it possessed in itself an intrinsic truth and fitness, or it could not have served, for more than a thousand years, as the basis for all Christian thinking. Nevertheless it was a rational doctrine, and in so far as he binds himself to the Logos conception John is false to his own idea of the Christian message as a revelation.

At this point, however, it is necessary to repeat that John is no mere theorist. He does not set out from a given doctrine but from a vital experience. Through Christ he has apprehended God, and the experience itself is real, whatever we make of the philosophy by which he tries to explain it. In Christ he has known God not only in his love and goodness but in his essential nature, and both sides of the revelation are so real to him that he feels compelled, as all Christian thinkers have been since, to bring them into some kind of synthesis. When it is once recognised that there was a divine significance in Jesus, it is impossible to draw a circle round his moral attributes and say "to this extent only he was divine." The question at once arises: "how was this moral divinity of Jesus related to his nature as a whole? Was he only a supremely good and holy man, or did he stand for something which was more than man?" No sophistry can conceal the fact that when all stress is laid on the purely ethical revelation Christianity ceases to be a religion. With whatever fervour it is presented it loses its absolute worth, and becomes a code of morals—and, even at that, a code that

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has no binding force, and may be superseded. This is clearly perceived by the plain man, who is never satisfied with demonstrations, however eloquent, of the moral perfection of Jesus. He asks the inevitable question, "was Jesus divine?" He puts the question crudely, with no clear notion of what divinity consists in; and yet he knows what he means. He wants the assurance that in Christ he can lay hold of the ultimate reality. If Christ has not in some manner revealed God himself, then the central element has fallen out of Christianity. Much has been said and written in recent years about the shortcomings of the Fourth Gospel; and the strictures, as we have seen, are not unjust. Yet the fact remains that this Gospel has always appealed to Christian men and women as the supreme expression of their religion. They have felt that in this book, above all others, they come into immediate fellowship with Christ and learn his message. And the secret of its attraction is nothing else than that strain in its thinking which deprives it, we are often told, of all real value. It presents Jesus not only in his human life, proclaiming God by his mercy and self-sacrifice, but as in some sense one with God. It ascribes to his nature a divine quality which gave significance to all that he said and did. This is the motive with which John writes his Gospel. He realises the moral grandeur of Jesus, but seeks to make us feel, as he himself felt, what lay behind it. His thought may be expressed in terms of a philosophical doctrine which has now grown strange to us; but at the heart of it there is his sense of a revelation. "The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us; and we beheld his glory."

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It is noteworthy that after the Prologue there is no further direct reference to the Logos doctrine. No doubt the idea is always present to the evangelist's mind that the divine principle, incarnate in Jesus, was nothing else than the Logos, as defined in the Alexandrian philosophy. Yet his interest is not in the philosophical idea but in the conviction which it enables him to express. There is little indication that he had ever read Philo, or had more than a superficial acquaintance with Logos speculation. All that he sought from it was the main conception that although God is exalted above human knowledge he yet goes forth from himself in a principle which is one with him and yet separate. Through this Logos which shares his nature he enters into relation with the world, and makes himself knowable. So all that is essential for John in the Logos doctrine is defined, outside of the Prologue, by other conceptions. More especially he falls back, like Paul, on the Old Testament idea of the glory of God. It would hardly be too much to say that in the body of the Gospel the term "glory" takes the place of Logos. "He manifested forth his glory."¹³ "Glorify thou me with thine own self, with the glory which I had with thee before the world was."¹⁴ "That they may behold the glory which thou hast given me, for thou lovedst me before the foundations of the World."¹⁵ In all such passages John takes up the Hebraic idea of a higher kind of being, revealed to men in the radiance that streams out from it. In Christ he perceives this glory, and ascribes it to an indwelling of the divine Logos. But he is concerned

¹³ John 2:11.

¹⁴ John 17:4, 5.

¹⁵ John 17:22-24.

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with the fact much more than with the theory which explains it. Men were conscious in the presence of Christ that he manifested the glory of God. Through him they apprehended the divine.

The Fourth Gospel is thus the necessary complement of the record given us in the Synoptics. There is truth in the assertion that it would lose half its value, and perhaps would impress us as arid and unsubstantial, if we did not unconsciously read into it the picture of Jesus which we have carried over from the previous Gospels. Yet it may be said with equal truth that apart from the Fourth Gospel the Synoptics would not convey their full meaning. They describe Jesus as Prophet and Teacher, as proclaiming the Kingdom of God and exemplifying in his own life the perfect obedience which it requires. But in this account of the work of Jesus we are apt to miss its deeper purport and motive. Why did Jesus exalt the moral law? Whence had he knowledge of the Kingdom of God? What was it in himself that gave authority to his teaching? These questions all arise out of the Synoptic record, and the answer to them is at least suggested. But it was left to the Fourth Evangelist to bring this answer clearly to light.

He declares that in Jesus God was manifested, and that all his actions were of the nature of "signs." It is not that he regards them merely as evidences, from which the divine calling of Jesus may be inferred. They are rather the facts which make inference unnecessary. A hero proves himself by his exploits; a poet or painter by

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the works which come from his hands. These are the "signs" by which the man shows himself for what he is. They are not data from which a truth may be argued, but the truth itself made palpable. So in the life of Jesus the evangelist sees the divine—the true light coming into the world.

He takes the life, therefore, as it had been recorded, and seeks to present it in its true character as God's revelation to men. Writing at a time when Jesus was fading into a theological abstraction he insists that the Word was made flesh—the revelation was given in the actual life. Sometimes it is maintained that he breaks away from the facts, and describes Jesus only as he has known him in the communion of faith. Out of the data supplied to him by inward contemplation he makes a concrete history. But his procedure is just the opposite, and in this we must find the whole meaning of his Gospel. He writes with the very purpose of counteracting those teachers who had sought, according to their own lights, to spiritualise the Christian message. They believed, like many earnest thinkers in later days, that a permanent religion could not be built on the contingent facts of history.¹⁶ If Christ was to be the object of faith he must be lifted out of time and place and known inwardly, as a divine power or symbol. Now the evangelist also had the inward knowledge of Christ. He writes with the conviction that the Christ who lived and died is one with the abiding presence to whom we have access in the experience of faith. But it is the central thesis of his Gospel that the

¹⁶ This is the assertion of Lessing.

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inward knowledge is only possible through knowledge of the actual life. We cannot begin with the Christ of faith and then project him by some allegorical process into history. First of all we must know Christ as he was, the Son of man who sojourned with men. In him we have received the revelation. All other knowledge is empty and unmeaning apart from that vision of the historical Jesus.

This, then, is John's answer to the Gnostic teachers of his day, and to all who have sought, as they did, to know God by mystical contemplation. He does not deny that such knowledge is valid, but it only becomes so when God is first known through Jesus. In him God revealed himself. The divine entered into our world and was made real to us, so that henceforth we might apprehend it. For only a little time the light was with men, and their knowledge of it was at best uncertain and fragmentary. The fuller knowledge was to come afterwards, through the operation of the Spirit. Yet the appearance in the flesh was the revelation. All that followed could be only the fuller disclosure of what was then given. "The Spirit will take the things that are mine, and will show them unto you."

CHAPTER IX

NEW AND OLD IN REVELATION

It is suggested by the very name of the New Testament that God makes himself truly known for the first time. He has hitherto been distant, but now he has come near to men, offering his mercy on the ground of a new covenant. All the writers are filled with a triumphant sense of the newness of the revelation, and it is this, above all else, which gives a unique power and freshness to their teaching. They speak like travellers who have just returned from a wonderful voyage of discovery. Those who come later may have more to tell, and may tell it more skilfully, but nothing can make up for the rapture of those first explorers to whom all is new.

Yet along with this sense of newness there is another feeling always present. Those earliest teachers are never able to forget that God, who now speaks in Christ, had already spoken to the fathers. Over against the new covenant there is the old one, which has somehow to be reconciled with the other. The effort is made to demonstrate that the older message had been a preparation for that which has displaced it. Proofs are accumulated from the pages of the Old Testament that God has fulfilled in Christ what he had promised and foreshadowed through the prophets. But while the Christian teachers thus find support in the older message we cannot but feel that they are confronted with a new problem, which they are

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always trying to solve. How can there be two revelations? If the former one had come from God, how could it be set aside? Undoubtedly the Christian message was at many points in conflict with that of the Law and the Prophets. How was it possible that the unchanging God could thus contradict himself?

For the New Testament writers this was the gravest and most urgent of all religious questions. They are hardly conscious of difficulties which to our minds appear much more serious; but as Jews they have constantly to reckon with that other revelation, at variance with their own. The problem as they knew it was peculiar to New Testament times, and especially to the earlier period when Christians were still bound to the Jewish law. Yet in the broader sense it is one which has never ceased to perplex Christian thought, and which has become more involved than ever in our own time. How is the Christian message to be related to other messages which likewise claim to be from God? How can it be accepted as the final revelation since it displaced those which went before it, and may therefore in its turn be displaced?

Before considering the New Testament answer to this problem it may be well to glance at others which have been put forward from time to time. (1) The New Testament period was scarcely over when the Gnostics made their great effort to break entirely loose from the old revelation. Believing with Paul that all things had been made new, they maintained that the gospel could not unfold itself freely so long as it was entangled in any way

with ancient beliefs and traditions. They therefore discarded the Old Testament, and proved by ruthless criticism that it was contrary to the teaching of Jesus. It represented God, not as the merciful Father but as a despotic King—vengeful, arbitrary, unjust. It prescribed a law which could have no other purpose than to hold the free spirit of man in bondage. Gnosticism allowed that the Old Testament was a revelation, but it contended that in this sacred book of the Jews an alien and inferior God had revealed himself—a God who was ignorant of the world of light above him. The work of Jesus was to deliver men from the tyranny of this lower God. He brought the knowledge of the true God and of his perfect, emancipating law. This Gnostic position is set forth in extravagant language, and is bound up with cosmical theories which make it appear utterly fantastic; but in itself it is logical and consistent. Accepting the belief that Christ had revealed God the Gnostics did not flinch from the inference that God had been hitherto unknown. When another revelation was offered them as also from God they would have none of it. A God might have given it, but not the God who had been proclaimed by Jesus. This Gnostic conclusion, stripped of its first-century mythology, has commended itself many times since not only to eccentric sects but to not a few devout Christian minds. They regard the Old Testament as nothing but a dead weight on Christianity, and would have it thrown aside. They assert, in so many words, that its God is one of the heathen divinities, and not the Father of Jesus Christ.

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(2) With a sure instinct, however, the church refused to sacrifice the splendid inheritance which it possessed in the Old Testament. No doubt its attitude was largely determined by the force of tradition. Jesus and the Apostles had used the Old Testament, and for more than a century it had continued to be the Bible of the church. It could not be abandoned, even when the New Testament had grown up by its side. But it was also recognised that without the older scripture the New Testament itself was unintelligible. Not only did it recall, almost in every sentence, the language of the Old Testament, but the ideas of the Law and the Prophets were so firmly embedded in the Christian teaching that they could not be removed. For good or ill the old revelation had to continue as part of the very substance of the new. The effect of the Gnostic revolt was to entrench the older scripture more firmly than ever, since it was found that in moving away from the ancient beliefs the Gnostic teachers had also broken with the gospel. Their effort to interpret Jesus as the revealer of a wholly new message had only transformed him into a dreamer or a fiction of mythology. So for the greater part of Christian history the two revelations were allowed to stand together. It was acknowledged that in many respects they conflicted, but the difficulty was overcome in various ways, more or less empirical. For one thing, while the Old Testament was formally accepted as the word of God, much of it was left unread. The church fastened on those portions of it which in some degree anticipated the Christian message, and quietly ignored the rest. When it was reminded of

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statements and episodes which were plainly inconsistent with the gospel it argued that they dealt with situations no longer existing, or that the ways of God are beyond human comprehension. Moreover, there was always the method of allegory by which any inconvenient text could be explained. By this device the whole of the Old Testament was brought within the compass of Christian teaching. Proceeding from God it must be credited with a meaning deeper than that which lies on the surface; its seeming difficulties must be taken as a challenge to probe into their hidden import. In this manner the Old Testament is commonly expounded to this day as a part of the Christian revelation.

(3) In our own time, the problem has received a new solution in view of critical and historical enquiry and the modern doctrine of development. We have learned to think of the gospel as new, and yet as linking itself with that which had been given already. God's revelation of himself went hand in hand with the progress of the race. In the lowliest phase of primitive religion God was speaking, as in the higher; but he adapted his truth to man's capacity, and each message was the necessary prelude to a further one. The Old Testament teaching, therefore, even in its crudest form, had in it the germ of the gospel. It required to be purified and unfolded, but from the first it was revelation, imparted to men as they were able to bear it.

In the New Testament itself we can discover at least something of this modern attitude. Our doctrine of development was in some measure anticipated by the idea

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of separate stages in the relation of God to the world. He had made a series of covenants with his people. As now he has approached them in Christ, so in times past he had made his covenant with Abraham, with Moses, with David; and each announcement of his purpose had been fuller and more definite than that which had gone before. As yet there is no suggestion of a gradual progress towards the larger light. It is assumed, rather, that God intervenes from time to time by a direct act, and that all advance is due to these new manifestations on the part of God. But under this ancient mode of thought the advance is recognised. In the Epistle to the Hebrews more especially we can discern in outline what is essentially a modern conception. The new covenant has taken the place of the old, but is integrally bound up with it. That which was formerly conveyed in shadows and symbols has now been given in very truth by Christ. The two covenants, so far from conflicting, throw light on each other. By examining the old ordinances and symbols we can discern aspects of Christ's work which would otherwise be obscure; and from our knowledge of the gospel we can make out the true significance of the types that preceded it. The new revelation, as this writer understands it, is the old one perfected.

The idea of a progressive revelation has commended itself, more than any other, to the modern mind, and in some respects it might seem to be forced on us by the facts. Yet it cannot be accepted without serious qualification. Sometimes it is so formulated as to bring revelation into the same class as ordinary knowledge, making it sub-

ject to the same evolutionary process. As the world advances towards a more adequate science, or a more fully organised society, so it is conceived as advancing towards knowledge of God. There are many in our day who would seem to judge religious ideas by no other standard than a chronological one. The beliefs of a thousand, or even a hundred years ago are necessarily wrong; those which are generally accepted now are true, or at least on the way to truth. It is taken for granted that the knowledge of God comes automatically through lapse of time. He can speak to men now as he could not possibly speak to ancient saints and prophets. They were better men than we are, but since they happened to live earlier they could not have the same intimacy with God. This mode of thinking has come to be accepted as a matter of course, and it surely involves a grave confusion. For that part, the very phrase "progressive revelation" confounds the whole question at issue. At first sight it seems happily to combine the notion of human progress with that of intervention on the part of God, and for this reason it satisfies the religious mind. The whole conflict of faith and humanism appears at one stroke to be laid to rest. We can believe in a steady advancement through science and culture, and also in a divine activity. Through human progress God is continually revealing himself. It is clear, however, when the idea is examined, that the human achievement is made everything. Revelation is no longer an act of God, who breaks through the natural order and makes known to men what they cannot discover for themselves. The divine act is conditioned by man's

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progress. God is passive, but men, in their onward march, are like mountain climbers who struggle from one height to another and find the outlook widening as they ascend. Thus the whole idea of revelation is tacitly abandoned. God does not come to men, but men, by their own effort attain to new conceptions of God.

From the outset, then, the church was called on to define the relation of its new message to that already given. Was the older revelation now abrogated? Was it merged in the later one? In so far as it was different could it still be preserved, with some function and value of its own? As time went on, the larger range of the problem became apparent. It was now recognised that in Gentile thought and religion, as well as in Jewish, God had made himself known; and Christian thinkers were engaged for several centuries in reconciling the gospel with this other revelation. In one form or another this has been their task ever since. But within the New Testament period the one engrossing question was the relation of Christianity to Judaism. Paul, in particular, was confronted during his whole career with the problem of the Law, and his writings are all concerned with it, more or less directly. Taken by itself the problem has ceased to have much more than an historical interest, but it involved the greater issue of the Christian attitude to all other revelations. From this point of view the ideas of Paul are still of pregnant significance.

To the earlier disciples the claim of the Law had presented no serious difficulty. They were all Jews, for

whom obedience to the Law was a second nature, and they were not aware that it conflicted in any way with their Christian faith. The Law was like a garment to which they were accustomed, and they did not feel it an encumbrance. To cast it off or exchange it for some other would only have meant discomfort, and would have distracted them from the one interest that mattered. It was not till they went out to the Gentiles that they were forced to consider whether the Law was still necessary. No one could doubt the Christian faith of these new converts; must they also conform to the Law before they could be accepted as brethren? Paul declared that they were freed from the Law, and that in the service of two masters there could be no true obedience. Not only so, but he perceived that Christianity was a new religion, based on a principle which was radically different from that of Judaism. The choice must be made, once for all, between the old revelation and the new one, between faith and the Law.

In some respects, however, he is not wholly consistent in this belief, which he asserts so vehemently. It is not merely that he remained too much a Jew to break completely with all that he had held most sacred. From childhood he had been trained to think of the Law as eternally binding, and he never quite freed himself of this conviction. Whenever he condemns the Law he is careful to throw in some qualifying word, by which a place can still be retained for it. But his inconsistency has another and deeper ground. He finds it impossible to believe that the everlasting God can ever change. "The

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gifts and the calling of God are without repentance.”¹ “Let God be true and every man a liar.”² Any revelation that God has once given must be forever valid. Behind Paul’s reverence for the Law there is the consciousness that the gospel itself is endangered if the earlier revelation is set aside as worthless. If we cannot believe what God spoke through his other messengers, what of our faith in Christ? Paul is always struggling with this dilemma. His answers may often appear doubtful and far-fetched, but he shows a real grasp of the central problem.

Broadly speaking his answer is that from the beginning there had only been one revelation—that which was given in Christ. God has ever been working with a view to this revelation. The actual coming of Christ was only the culminating moment of an eternal plan, in the light of which everything has to be explained. The Law stands over against the gospel as alien and hostile; but it was meant from the first to lead men to the gospel. God designed that it should reign for a period, and by the very impossibility of its demand convince men of their need and “shut them in” to the message of Christ.³

Paul sees, however, that in this way he has ascribed a partial, temporary value to a revelation which, if it was divine, must be eternally valid. He admits, therefore, that the Law itself is “holy,”⁴ and that its seeming deficiency lies in the nature of man. Ever since Adam sin has taken possession of men, who as fleshly creatures are incapable of obeying the commands of God. In a sense the Law has

¹ Romans 11:29.

³ Romans 11:32.

² Romans 3:4.

⁴ Romans 7:12.

failed because it was too much of a divine revelation. It sets before us an ideal which to our lower nature is unattainable. If man had been a spiritual being, like the angels, he might have risen to the height of this revelation, but he is "carnal, sold under sin."⁵ The will of God, proclaimed in its unrelenting purity, becomes the enemy of men. They need to be delivered from the Law, as from the full rays of a sun which blinds instead of enlightening.

This estimate of the Law obviously lies open to many criticisms. For one thing, the Law would seem to be actually higher in quality than the message of Christ, which has to be given at last as more tolerable to man's earthly weakness. This is certainly not Paul's judgment, and yet he is driven by his logic to suggest that not the Law but Christ himself is our "schoolmaster," leading us to that higher stage when we shall be fit to obey the Law in all its perfection. Again, Paul's account of the Law is untrue to patent facts. So far from being unapproachable in its spiritual demand it consists for the most part of ancient ceremonial which is almost devoid of moral and religious value. In this respect it has had no severer critic than Paul himself. He points out repeatedly that these mechanical observances can do nothing for man's higher life. He sees plainly that the Law, even if men were able to fulfil it, could never be a way of salvation. It had not revealed but had obscured the true nature of God, as we know it in Christ. Man was unable to obey it, not because it was far above him but simply because it broke up the will of God into innumerable fragments which no one

⁵ Romans 7:14.

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could fit together or even carry in his memory. Paul is never tired of insisting that in "the simplicity of the gospel" we have all that the Law requires and infinitely more.

The real interest in Paul's discussion of the Law is not to be found in any specific doctrines but in the main conception that the gospel, although a new message, is yet linked up with previous revelation. He takes his stand on the principle that God cannot contradict himself. Since the Christian message is from God it must somehow be related to former messages from God with which it seems to be in conflict. It is so related not merely in the sense that it is an outgrowth from what went before. A view like this is excluded by the very idea of revelation, which implies the direct intervention of God. His light breaks suddenly through the darkness, making known to men what they had never hitherto surmised. The Christian revelation, like no other, was wholly new. Nothing in the world's previous thought had prepared men for it; and it was this complete unexpectedness which convinced Paul that it was a revelation. His argument always takes the line: "this message is so utterly different from all that men have thought and guessed that it must have burst in from a world unknown; you are manifestly confronted here with God himself." His problem, therefore, is to affirm the absolute newness of the message and at the same time to admit the validity of the older messages which were likewise from God.

It is recognised by Paul that Christ appeared "in the

fulness of the times";⁶ but this does not imply that in revealing himself to men God had waited until they had reached a certain stage of maturity. That whole idea of progressive revelation is alien to Paul's mind. For that part, he seems to regard human history as a process not of advance but of deterioration. Man had begun with a clear apprehension of God, in whose image he had been made, but the light had grown ever more dim through pride and false wisdom. The outcome of man's progress had not been a higher enlightenment but the blindness and corruption which had sunk the world in base idolatries. The "fulness of the time," as Paul employs the phrase, has reference solely to God's will. God had determined that at a given moment he would make himself known through Christ, and all that had previously happened must be set in the light of that divine intention. Here, then, we find Paul's answer to his problem of the relation of the gospel to the earlier messages. Ever and again, in the course of history, God has revealed himself; and the revelations have all been valid, even when they appear to differ from that which has been given in Christ. For God has proceeded according to a fixed plan. He had resolved from the first to manifest himself in Christ, and so ordered all his government of the world as to lead up to that one event. There has only been one revelation, fulfilling itself at a particular time; but it may be regarded as a continuous act, extending over all history, and reaching back to a point before time began. It might almost be said that Paul conceives of the past as a great

⁶ Gal. 4:4.

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mechanism, designed for a specific purpose. When it is completed a single touch puts it in action and it performs its work: Until then there might seem to be no meaning in the vast network of wheels and levers, but now it becomes apparent that every one of them has its function. All has been constructed with a view to the final decisive act. One might, indeed, apply to Paul's conception of history that image of an organism by which he describes the church. There are many members which have not the same office, and yet they all work together, and when one suffers the others suffer with it. And as Christ is the animating principle of the church, so he has been of the world's history. He gives it unity and significance. He is the power which, in the last resort, has determined all the changes and activities which are in themselves inexplicable. Paul thus accounts for all the previous revelations by declaring boldly that there has only been one revelation. At the fixed time God sent his Son, and the message given in him was entirely new, disclosing that eternal purpose which had been hidden even from the angels. Yet the truth which was thus revealed for the first time was already apparent, if men had known only how to look for it. All God's action in history had been pointing towards it. The prophets, under the guidance of the Spirit, had foreshadowed it. What had now been revealed in Christ had been implicit always in the divine plan.

It is in this manner that Paul understands the Christian message as new and amazing, and yet as in full harmony with all previous revelation. God had not contradicted

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himself. He had not replaced an inferior message with a higher one. He had not been withholding his truth until men should be sufficiently enlightened to take it in. In all his dealings with men he had been disclosing the message, but hitherto they had been like children watching a design as it grows slowly under the pencil of the artist. Every touch is in keeping with the central idea and is meant to suggest it, but nothing is intelligible until the final stroke. Paul applies this idea specifically in his criticism of the Law. He believes that the Law is divine and cannot therefore be set aside, even though it apparently conflicts with the gospel. For the God who spoke in Christ spoke also in the Law, and through Christ the Law has explained itself. We can see now why it was necessary and what it effected and in what sense it is still valid. "Do we make void the Law through faith? No, we establish the Law."⁷ So in Christ we have the key to all other disclosures of God's purpose. There are not many revelations but only one, on which the others converge.

Paul thus thinks of revelation as dependent wholly on the will of God, who has himself ordained the time and manner in which it should be given. Men can no more hasten or retard this action of God than they can control the moment of an eclipse. It follows that Paul is never troubled by the question as to whether the revelation in Christ may eventually be superseded. He was ignorant of our theories of development, but even though he had

⁷ Romans 3:31.

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known them he would have said that they had nothing to do with the fact of revelation. It was indeed true that the world in past ages had been travelling towards Christ, but this did not mean that it would some day travel beyond him. For the divine purpose was in no way conditioned by human progress. If it was the plan of God that at a given time he would make himself known, then it mattered nothing although millions of years should succeed that time. The revelation made at the moment of God's choosing was still the final one. There could be only the one revelation, and when it was once given it must stand forever.

The question of the future, however, does not directly arise for Paul. With all his breadth of outlook he continued to move within the confines of apocalyptic thought. He believed that the present age was all but finished, and that the new age of the Kingdom of God would presently begin. He expected that he would himself survive until the Lord's coming and the great consummation. At the same time this expectation of the imminent end was no essential part of Paul's gospel. He admitted that on this point he had no certain light, and towards the close of his career he seems definitely to have abandoned the confidence that he would himself witness the Lord's return. From the outset he had allowed for an interval that was still to elapse, and it was in this belief that he undertook his great mission. The Lord would soon appear, but not immediately. A short time was left in which the world might receive knowledge of him. Paul may have anticipated, at least in his first enthusiasm, that the gospel by its

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intrinsic truth would win an instant acceptance. The light needed only to be kindled in a number of central cities, and all God's elect people would rally to it. Or perhaps he looked for some supernatural power which would second his own efforts. As God had sent the message so he would himself ensure that it would be made manifest over the whole world. In any case, he counted on a few years which had yet to run their course, and as time went on, and the difficulties of his task became ever more apparent, he allowed for a still greater interval.

The possibility of new revelation was thus present to Paul's mind. However soon he expected the end to come he had to reckon with the fact that a generation had already passed since the death of Christ, and that during that time God had been revealing himself in new and unlooked-for ways. The Spirit had been vouchsafed to the church and was throwing fresh light on the gospel. Christ, though he had departed, was still in fellowship with his people, and his message now was different from what it had been on earth—so much so that Paul refused to know Christ after the flesh, and looked only to this present revelation. It was apparent, too, that while the Gentiles responded to the gospel they understood it in a new manner. They were awake to aspects of it which had been hidden from the earlier disciples, and Paul believed that this knowledge of the Gentiles was deeper and more comprehensive than that of the mother church. He did not require, therefore, to imagine a distant future, when men would look with different eyes on what had once appeared to be the final truth. Already since the de-

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parture of Jesus there had been new revelations. How were they related to that which he had given?

In his effort to answer this question Paul arrives at some of the profoundest and most fruitful of his religious ideas. He sets out from the fact that the revelation in Christ is final; if, therefore, it appears to offer itself in new forms this must itself be an element in its finality. It is not something fixed and constant, but a living source out of which new messages are to well up continually. This is the meaning of the passage in which the new covenant is contrasted with that of Moses.⁸ The Law had been engraved unalterably on tables of stone, and men were henceforth to know God through this changeless Law. God thus became ever more distant. The glory on Moses' face as he came down from the Mount began to fade, and the religion which had been fixed in the past was bound to fade likewise. The Law was still read out in the synagogues, in the same immemorial words, and those who heard it were not aware that the life had now passed out of it. Through Christ, on the other hand, men have entered into a vital relation to God. They look with open face on his glory and see it always renewing itself, and are changed themselves from glory to glory. Paul dwells repeatedly on this theme of the inexhaustible riches of Christ.⁹ In the gospel we have no set formulation of God's will but a fellowship with God himself, and have access therefore to an ever new and fuller knowledge.

It may be granted that Paul was not wholly just to the Law. Although it was held to be finally authoritative

⁸ II Cor. 3:7 ff.

⁹ Eph. 3:8.

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there was always the conviction, in the best Jewish minds, that new truth could be discovered in it, almost without limit. The aim of Rabbinical exposition, however strange its methods, was to maintain through the Law a living apprehension of God's will. Old ordinances and traditions were so re-interpreted as to afford divine guidance in present needs. Yet in its main contention the criticism of Paul was justified. By its very nature the Law had arrested the stream of revelation, as was apparent from the cessation of prophecy when once the dominance of the law was established. In the Rabbinical teaching we indeed meet with fresh and often beautiful insight; but it has come, for the most part, in spite of the Law. God has truly spoken to his servants, but his message loses half its meaning because they feel constrained to attach it to some outworn text with which it has no inner connection. Probably it is true of all that is finest in the Rabbinical sayings that the idea is not contained in the words expounded. Paul's criticism holds good not only of the Law but of all religions of "the letter," and within this class all the non-Christian religions may fairly be included. So long as it is assumed that the truth is fixed, in some rule or institution or traditional doctrine, there can be no fresh revelation. The Law has interposed itself between man and the living God.

Paul holds, therefore, that between the Christian religion and any other there is all the difference between that which lives and moves and that which stands still. This is the very reason why he sees in it the one true revelation. Nothing is properly known until you possess

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it as an active principle in your own mind. You may so learn an art as to copy a model before you with almost perfect exactness, but you do not know the art until you can produce such things yourself. A nation may be so drilled and organised that the world can point to it as a signal example of ordered government. Yet it is not truly a nation until the laws have become instincts and the government an expression of the general will. So there is no real knowledge of God in which the divine life is not, in some measure, active. By means of the earlier revelation men were given rules and beliefs which in themselves were valid, but could only be followed externally. The prophet had foreseen a day when God would write his law in the hearts of men, and they would not need to instruct each other, for all would know him, as a light and a power within them.¹⁰ This alone would be true knowledge, and Paul believed that it was realised through the gospel. Men could now know God in the sense that they possessed him. His life was working in their own.

Paul could not, therefore, conceive of the Christian revelation as uniform and static. It belonged to the very idea of the Law that God had spoken once for all. He had laid down his will and had withdrawn himself, and man's duty was simply to maintain in every jot and tittle what had been decreed. The immutable Law took the place of God. But through Christ he was in continual fellowship with men. He conveyed his will in new messages which were always different. It might seem, indeed, as if the truth of Christ were in danger of losing itself in an end-

¹⁰ Jer. 31:31.

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less diversity. Paul has himself occasion to protest against the parties which called themselves by various names—Paul and Apollos and Cephas—and which threatened to break up the body of Christ. Yet he takes exception not to the differences, but to the divisive spirit which connects them with human leaders. He acknowledges that without difference there can be no Christianity. If men are in communion with God they must all respond to him according to their individual minds; they must see the truth as it bears on their own lives and needs. A formal tradition has always the same character; a revelation is by its nature manifold. No church has yet dared, or perhaps will ever dare, to allow full scope to the principle of freedom as understood by Paul. He himself confessed in his later days that it had given encouragement to strange, half-Pagan types of belief. Yet the principle on which he so boldly insisted undoubtedly lies in the very conception of the gospel. If God is to be known immediately the soul must be left entirely free to make its own answer to God.

Paul admits, therefore, that the new message involves diversity. In former ages there had been a multitude of religions, corresponding to the gods many and lords many who were worshipped by mankind. It might appear as if Christ, instead of bringing the one final truth, had divided men more than ever in their approach to God. But for Paul this manifoldness in the new revelation is itself an element in its oneness and finality. Since it is final it must be all-inclusive, and capable of endless applications while it remains the same. Paul's conception is

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best illustrated by his own practice. In view of the countless new problems—social, political, theological—which he encountered in the Gentile world he re-cast the whole Christian teaching. To almost all of Jesus' ideas he gives a form of expression which Jesus himself would not have recognised; and he has often been accused, in his own time and since, of perverting the gospel. He protests, however, that his mind is that of Jesus; and undoubtedly, in the deeper sense, his claim is just. He looks not to the literal teaching of Jesus but to the great principles involved in it. He sets them in new lights and detaches them from accidental forms, in the effort to bring out more fully their essential meaning. With all the differences it is the same revelation.

For Paul, therefore, the Christian message is the final in the sense that it is the only one. It had been withheld until the time appointed by God, and came as wholly new and unexpected; nevertheless it had been always coming. God had spoken through the prophets; he had disclosed his Law to Moses; even to the heathen he had made himself known by an inward light. These previous messages had all been imperfect, and might seem at variance with each other and with the truth as now revealed; yet they all had their place in the eternal plan of God, and we can see them at last in their true significance. And as all the earlier messages had converged in Christ, so he is the inexhaustible source of all later revelation. Paul might seem at times to regard the gospel as final in the sense that everything had now been given. The church

has often read this meaning into his thought, and has striven like the Rabbis, and even more zealously, to "build a fence around the Law." This, however, is to misunderstand Paul, and the whole New Testament teaching. The message of Christ is presented as final inasmuch as the truth conveyed in it is now to determine all revelation. For the very reason that the truth has been made known a boundless field is opened for new messages from God. The final demonstration of a great principle is always a new beginning, far more truly than it is an end. When mathematical theory was established by Euclid, this did not mean that science had been closed to all future enquirers. It was the beginning of science. The human mind was now at liberty to apply mathematical law in ways undreamed of, and by means of it to spell out all the secrets of the visible universe. This, Paul would say, was also true of the revelation in Christ. What men had been seeking was at last given them. God had now disclosed his eternal purpose, and in the light of it all knowledge was possible. The door had been thrown open for countless new revelations which would disclose the deep things of God.

CHAPTER X

THE SPIRIT AND THE CHURCH

UNTIL the death of Paul it was still believed that the end of all things was at hand. Christ had departed, but would presently return in power to bring in the Kingdom of God. For the brief interval that remained the church was nerved to a mighty effort, like an army on the day of battle. Paul himself was confident that the end was near, and never consciously looked out beyond his own age. Yet he discovered in the very nature of the gospel certain pregnant ideas from which all later thought was to take its departure.

When the Fourth Evangelist wrote, the exultant mood of the early days had passed away. The Lord had not returned, and the church was called on to prepare itself not for a single generation of heroic struggle but for an indefinite future. The evangelist looks back on the revelation which had been made in a bygone time to a little company in a distant region of the world, and asks himself how it is to last on, and to mean the same to all mankind as it meant to the first disciples. This is his problem; and he finds the answer to it in the ideas suggested by Paul.

Paul had been conscious that the fellowship with Christ

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which began at his conversion had endured, and had become ever deeper and closer. The light which had shone in his heart had continued to shine, and he explained this in mystical fashion as due to an inward union with Christ, who was still invisibly present with his people. He also expressed this sense of the living Christ in terms of that conception of the Spirit which he had taken over from the primitive church. Through faith in Christ a supernatural power enters into the believer. As God had revealed himself in Christ, so he continues to make his revelation through the Spirit which Christ has given. John lays hold of these Pauline ideas. He conceives of the earthly life of Jesus, in which the Word was manifested under conditions of space and time, as succeeded by another. Jesus, by his death, was set free from the limitations which had confined the knowledge of him to one accidental circle. For John this is the chief significance of the Cross. It marked the passing of Jesus out of the sphere of the visible and transient into the timeless state of being. He had withdrawn from the sight of men in order to return and to abide forever—present everywhere with his people and dwelling in their very hearts. In this manner John reconciles the early apocalyptic hopes with his own conviction that the life of the church was only beginning. The return of Christ was not to close the world's history, for Christ had returned already. On the very morrow of his death he had come again, to continue on a greater scale and with a new and more intimate power the work which he had begun.

With John, as with Paul, this idea of a mystical fellow-

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ship with Christ interchanges with that of the indwelling Spirit. He makes little effort to distinguish between the Christ who returns, and the Spirit which is sent in place of Christ. His aim is rather to bring the two conceptions as closely together as possible. Throughout the Supper discourses Christ and the Comforter keep merging in one another, as in a dissolving picture. "I will come to you" alternates, almost in the same sentence with "The Spirit will come."¹ There is a definite place for the Spirit only in so far as the specific work assigned to it is that of revelation. By union with Christ the believer receives the divine life, while the Spirit illuminates—recalling perpetually the message which Christ had brought, and disclosing more and more of its infinite significance.

At this point, however, it is necessary to note precisely the function which John ascribes to the Spirit. He speaks of it as bringing to remembrance what Jesus had taught,² testifying to Jesus,³ convincing the world of righteousness and judgment,⁴ leading to all truth and disclosing things to come.⁵ The Spirit, after Jesus has gone, will act in his stead and speak for him. "He shall glorify me, for he will receive of mine and show it unto you."⁶ From these utterances it has commonly been inferred that the work of the Spirit is that of interpretation. The Greek theologians who formulated the great creeds, with the aid of scripture and philosophy, believed that in this task they

¹ Cf. John 14:17, 18

³ 15:26.

⁵ 16:14.

² 14:26.

⁴ 16:8.

⁶ 16:14.

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were guided by the Spirit. Their work was taken up at a later time by the scholastic doctors, who likewise thought of the Spirit as directing the effort of reason. To this day the Christian teacher prays for the light of the Spirit, and feels that it is granted him when he attains to clear insight into some difficult truth. All this, however, is foreign to John's conception. He distinguishes between the knowledge that comes by thought and that which comes supernaturally, and identifies the Spirit with this higher kind of knowledge. No one can deny that the Nicene Fathers and the great schoolmen were acute thinkers, honest in their desire to unravel the problems of Christian belief. Yet their work was the same in kind as that of the chemist or logician. They dealt, to be sure, with a different material, but their method and their mental attitude were just the same. By his doctrine of the Spirit John seeks to define another kind of illumination. He declares that knowledge will be given to the believer which is undiscoverable by any mere process of thought. The Spirit will not instruct and interpret but will reveal.

The distinction is a very real one, but to put it into words is next to impossible. As soon as truth is revealed we find ourselves compelled to think about it, and can draw no precise line between our thinking and the revelation. The Fourth Evangelist himself was enlightened by the Spirit, and wrote what is aptly described by Clement of Alexandria as a "spiritual Gospel." Yet much of his teaching, as we have seen, is the outcome of reflection. He reads into the Christian message the ideas of Hellenistic thought, and believes that his interpretation, as

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well as his religious vision, has been given him by the Spirit. There has been a similar confusion in the minds of many later teachers whose prophetic call cannot be questioned. While they spoke in the power of the Spirit they were also men of their particular church and period, and fell in with the modes of thought which were provided for them. The ideas which they put forward most confidently as coming to them directly from above are often those which at once betray them as mediæval Catholics, or evangelicals of the nineteenth century, or present-day socialists. No sure criterion will ever be found by which mere thinking can be marked off from revelation.

None the less there is truth which is revealed and timeless, and truth which has come by thought and in process of later thought will be superseded. The distinction is not one of degree only but of kind, and is no less apparent in art and literature than in religion. Works which were once applauded have had their day, while others, which were rated far below them, have lasted on and will last for ever. No one can tell by any analysis why they have this peculiar virtue. We can only say that there is something in them which belongs to a world outside of time, and time cannot touch them. So in religion the word which is divinely given has a quality of its own. As we read the sacred books of Egypt, India, Persia, we seem to be wading through interminable stretches of desert sand. Yet here and there in the waste of dead myth and speculation we come on some thought which is like a living flower. It has still truth in it, and power to move us. We are conscious that it is different in nature from all the

rest, and was given directly from God. It bears the stamp of revelation.

This, then, is the idea which John seeks to convey by his doctrine of the Spirit. He does not mean that in future days, when their minds are more adequate to the task, men will learn to reflect on the truth which Jesus had given and explain it in all its compass. He means, rather, that new truth will come to them of the same kind as that which had come through Jesus. They had now obtained free access to God, and he would continue to send messages out of the higher world. As Jesus had been with them for a little while, so the Spirit would be with them always. In other words, the work of the Spirit is not so much to interpret and develop the truth of Christ, as to preserve for it, in all time to come, the character of revelation.

Two elements are distinguished in this work of the Spirit. On the one hand, the truth communicated will be new, for newness belongs to the very essence of revelation. We know a truth to be revealed because it brings with it a thrill of surprise. A window is suddenly opened, and we look out, as if for the first time, on a strange world. The message of Jesus had in itself been incomplete. Although he was the Word made flesh and had manifested the divine life, he had worked under earthly limitations, and had men around him who could only understand him in part. He had perforce to express himself in veiled language, and to withhold much that he desired to say. "These things have I spoken to you while

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I was still with you, but the Spirit will come and will lead you to all truth.”⁷ “I have many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now.”⁸ The Spirit was therefore to continue the revelation. Jesus had been like a great discoverer, opening a path which no one had guessed before him. Others could now follow it, and it would lead to ever new secrets and wonders. What Jesus had given was not a single, self-contained message, as in the old religions, but a fresh power of apprehension, which would be active in all who believed on him. This is one of the pervading thoughts of the Fourth Gospel—that Jesus had bequeathed to men his own capacity for receiving the things of God. Along with his message he had also given the Spirit. But while it thus bestows new knowledge, it also guards and perpetuates what has been received. In one sense, it brings nothing new, for everything was contained in the message of Jesus, and all fresh truth will spring from that message and will reproduce it. “The new commandment is the old commandment, which you had from the beginning.”⁹ “The Spirit will take the things that are mine, and will show them unto you.”¹⁰ Perhaps the evangelist’s chief motive in writing the Gospel is to assert this identity of the revelation in all its phases. He finds himself confronted with the rising Gnostic heresies in which Christianity was almost entirely severed from its origins, and feels that they have thus emptied it of meaning. He takes his stand on the historical record. The Word was made flesh, and all new knowledge is worthless until it is rooted in that reality.

⁷ 14:25, 26.

⁸ 16:12.

⁹ 1 John 2:7.

¹⁰ John 16:14.

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So by his doctrine of the Spirit he seeks to present the revelation, once given in Jesus, as an abiding one. Through the Spirit Jesus is ever speaking, and the truth he imparts is the same always as that which he declared in his earthly life.

At first sight these two conceptions may seem to be opposed to each other. The Spirit leads forward to new truth; it also keeps the old truth unaltered. Most of the difficulties which beset the Fourth Gospel may be traced back to this contradiction which seems to affect its teaching at the very centre. Is it the testimony of an original disciple, or a manifesto of the later church, after the break with primitive tradition? Does it proceed from a single mind, or from several minds, in partial conflict with each other? But the inconsistencies are explained when we have grasped the idea which the evangelist is always trying to express. Assured as he is that the truth was once for all revealed in Christ, he is no less certain that if the truth is to have any value it must be continually revealed. If it is handed down as an ancient tradition it will share the fate of all truth which has once been living and has gradually withered away. While remaining the same it needs to be apprehended in new forms, which in their turn must give place to others as they grow outworn. It needs to relate itself to new conditions, for life is always changing, and no truth can endure unless it responds to life. A revelation, however old it may be, must preserve its newness. It ceases to be revelation unless it brings with it the exultant sense that it has come fresh from heaven.

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In his doctrine of the Spirit, therefore, John seeks to enforce this twofold nature of the Christian message. It is historically given, and is yet abiding. The one revelation is ever repeating itself, but the repetition is at the same time a renewal. Here we must again remember the crucial time at which John wrote his Gospel. Christianity had arrived at the great turning-point of its history, when it had to face the future instead of the past. It stood no longer in a direct relation to Jesus. No one who had even seen him or had knowledge of him from his first disciples, was now alive. With this break in the direct association with Jesus there had come a waning of the first enthusiasm. The hope of the Parousia had failed; the faith which had begun as a glorious discovery had become a matter of custom; the church was dissolving into factions, and was also exposed to outward danger. It seemed, at the beginning of the second century, as if the new religion could only maintain itself on one or other of two conditions. It must either harden, like all previous religions, into a rigid tradition, or it must abandon its earlier beliefs and fall in with the ideas of the time. Both of these methods had been adopted in the age when the Fourth Gospel was written. The church had taken shape as an institution, with a fixed creed and ritual, while over against it had arisen the heresies, which tried to save the Christian movement by merging it in new currents of religious thought. John perceived that there was a third alternative. He offered it not merely by way of compromise, but saw that it was demanded by the intrinsic nature of the message. According to this view of John,

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Christ is always coming, just as really as he came at first. The truth he spoke in the past is ever renewing itself, so that each generation can receive it as fresh and living. What is meant is not merely that through the Spirit we vividly realise what Christ had been while he lived on earth. This was how John's idea was understood by St. Francis and his followers, who sought by intense contemplation of the life of Jesus to lift it out of the past. In our own day we have innumerable efforts to re-construct the life in its historical setting, and behind all of them there is a similar desire to bring it back to us, as in some manner present. With John, however, the Spirit does more than revive an inspiring memory. It keeps men still in fellowship with Christ, so that they hear him speaking to them. He offers the same revelation as when he dwelt on earth, but proclaims it in new language. He relates it to present modes of thought, and to the tasks and difficulties which are peculiar to each age and to each individual life. This difference, as John recognises, is necessary if the message is to remain the same. If it were only the old message repeated, it could not have the value which it had at first, or make the same impression. However exactly you may follow the track of some ancient voyager you do not thereby recover the rapture with which he gazed on a new land or ocean. By the fullest knowledge of the life and teaching of Jesus you are not made to feel, with the first disciples, that he brought a revelation. It is by disclosing new wonders that the Spirit gives us the vision as it came to them. The old commandment is repeated as a new one, and by this it

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becomes, in very deed, the old commandment. All the later history of our religion has served to illustrate this fundamental thought of John. The landmarks of the history have been the successive revivals. It has proved insufficient simply to maintain the old beliefs and morals, and to carry on, however diligently, the stated practices of worship. A crust is always in process of forming, and requires from time to time to be broken. The message which came direct from God must so come again, under the impulse of the Spirit.

The idea of the Spirit, wherever it meets us in the New Testament, is associated in the closest manner with that of the church. It is assumed that the Spirit resides in the holy community, and that each Christian man receives it as a member of that community. For the modern mind this might seem very largely to cancel the worth of the conception. We would now accept in its largest meaning the declaration of John that the Spirit bloweth where it listeth.¹¹ The divine influence breathes upon us sometimes out of unlooked-for places. Men of all creeds and perhaps of no creed have yet been, as Heine said of himself, knights of the Holy Spirit. The New Testament writers appear to be false to their own deeper instincts when they describe the Spirit as working exclusively in the church. Yet the restriction is not to be set down to mere narrowness of outlook. With Paul, at any rate, it is inseparable from the assurance, which forms the very core of his religion, that God cannot be known until he reveals

¹¹ John 3:8.

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himself. Men have found God because he spoke to them in Christ, and the Spirit can witness to him only among Christ's people. The suggestion is sometimes made that if Paul had become acquainted with Paganism in its loftier and purer aspects, through earnest thinkers like Seneca and Epictetus, he would have acknowledged that the Spirit of God was moving elsewhere than in the church. But it is much more likely that he would have insisted, even more strongly, on his restriction. He would have confessed gladly that those great teachers would certainly have found God, if it were possible to find him by human wisdom; but in the failure of their noble effort they had only made it the more apparent that the natural man cannot receive the things of God. Only in the Christian fellowship could these hidden things be known. "God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit."¹² It is to be noted that every word in this statement is emphatic. True knowledge must be from God. It can come only through a revelation. The revelation is given by the Spirit, and on us alone, who are Christ's people, has the Spirit been bestowed.

On more specific grounds Paul thinks of the Spirit as the peculiar possession of the church. He had observed, for one thing, that the higher impulse was wont to visit the brethren when they were met for common worship. This was so well understood in the primitive church that a general meeting seems always to have been called when some clear direction was needed from the Spirit.¹³ The gift had been conferred on all Christians, but they could

¹² I Cor. 2:10.

¹³ Cf. Acts 13:2. I Cor. 5:3, 4.

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not rightly exercise it except when they were met together. Modern psychology has much to say on the subject of mass emotion, which is still a mysterious one. Paul advances no theory, but simply accepts the fact that when men are assembled in the name of Christ they are sensitive to powers which would not otherwise touch them. He declares more than once that even in their separate lives and private devotions they must carry with them a sense of unison with their fellow-believers. "That we may comprehend with all saints what is the length and breadth and height, and know the love of God."¹⁴ In this great prayer a thought is expressed which is always in the background of Paul's mind. God is the Father of all men; Christ died for all men. There can be no true knowledge unless the individual is one in sympathy with the whole people of God.

Again, Paul sees in the church the power which makes for stability amidst the ebb and flow of Christian opinion. Already in his time there were marked divergences in practice and belief, and the danger was always present that the one religion might fall apart into a number of conflicting "gospels." Paul was acutely aware of this danger, and one of his chief objects was to consolidate and strengthen the church. As a practical missionary he sought by every possible means to unite the scattered communities. As a thinker, he made the idea of the church an integral part of Christian doctrine. He realised, more and more fully as his life went on, that the new religion must be placed on a stable basis. Freedom was

¹⁴ Eph. 3:18, 19.

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no doubt of the essence of Christian faith; the body of Christ had many members, and room must be allowed for all differences. Yet the members were all necessary to each other, and would act effectively only through a community which would bring the diverse life into a single channel. Again and again Paul appeals from individual judgments to that of the church as a whole. He holds that in all doubtful matters the course most likely to be right is that which has commended itself to the general mind. This view was employed at a later period in the interests of ecclesiastical tyranny. The doctrine of the Spirit, which was meant originally to secure free access to God for all believers, was so interpreted as to quench the Spirit. This higher power was supposed to operate only through the officials and sacraments of the organised church. But while the idea is easily capable of perversion it is nevertheless true that the church is necessary to the work of the Spirit. It was apparent in Paul's day and has been proved abundantly in the times since, that the individual, however sincere, is liable to deceive himself. He mistakes some prejudice or illusion of his own for the message of God. He loses his feeling for those things which are distinctively Christian. The church, even as an outward institution, has at least preserved a continuity in Christian life and faith. It stands for the historical religion, so that new truth can be tested, from time to time, by that which was once given.

Once more, there is no true revelation which is not in its nature central and universal. It has been the error of all religions, and too often of Christianity, to see God

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revealing himself only in that which is extraordinary. For the primitive church the Spirit was manifest in miracles and speaking with tongues. The seer of the Apocalypse attributed his strange visions to the Spirit, and his work is still known, pre-eminently, as "the Revelation." The Gnostics distinguished between the normal Christian beliefs, meant only for the multitude, and the higher, esoteric doctrines which were revealed. So in all times revelation has been identified with rare experiences, peculiar teachings, ideas that cannot be defined except in abstruse technical terms. Yet in reality it is just the opposite of all this. It brings with it the immediate sense of God. It makes appeal not to exceptional, highly trained intelligence, but to something that is elemental in man's nature. "These things," said Jesus, "are hidden from the wise and prudent and are revealed to babes."¹⁵ This is the very proof of revelation, that every one can respond to it. That which has meaning only for some inner circle may be marvellous and profound, but it belongs to the sphere of knowledge and will pass away. Nothing is revealed which does not in some way touch the lives of all men at the very centre.

It is most of all for this reason that there needs to be a community to co-operate with the Spirit. Men come and go, but the church lasts on, and includes in it all sorts and conditions, all minds and temperaments. In such a community the only truths that can maintain themselves are those which concern all men alike. The general sense of the church acts as a filter which will strain out, sooner

¹⁵ Matt. 11:25.

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or later, anything that is accidental or ephemeral in the Christian faith. Those things which can survive, age after age, belong to the essential message—to the revelation, as opposed to the guesses and formalities. It cannot be denied that the church has sometimes identified itself with error and injustice, and that the advance towards a purer religion and a more humane society has taken place, apparently, in spite of it. But we must be careful not to confound the church itself with the dogmatists and ecclesiastics who profess to speak for it. There is always the great mass of Christian men and women who hold, even in the worst times, to the things which matter, and whose mind, in the end, will prevail. The errors in which the church becomes entangled have always been rejected finally by the church itself. It stands, in its deeper consciousness, for that which is real and permanent in the gospel—for love, righteousness, patience, faith in God.

Here, however, we encounter the difficulty with which our religion has always had to reckon. The church makes for stability. It is the conservative force, maintaining the authentic message which is always in danger of losing itself in the constant flux of the world's life and thought. If the church is condemned for holding fast to a given tradition, we must never forget that this is the very purpose for which it exists. It represents the abiding element in the religion, the beliefs and pieties which must hold their own through all changes. The function of the church is to preserve; but there is always the danger that along with the essential things it should perpetuate

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everything. Doctrines and forms which have grown up around the revelation and which possibly obscure it are handed down with the revelation itself. All is preserved, and at last the ivy chokes the tree.

This danger could not be clearly foreseen by the New Testament writers. They lived in the time when Christianity was struggling for bare existence, and their one anxiety was to make the church into a citadel. Against all hostile forces within and without it must hold fast to its confession. In so far as it maintained the faith once delivered to the saints¹⁶ it was the organ of the Spirit. Nevertheless the thought is always present that while it guards the tradition it must witness from time to time to new truth. Paul appeals to the church as against false teachers who perverted the gospel, but he also calls it to his help in his battle with the legalists, who refused to accept the larger message. He holds that the church, as the community of the Spirit, must yield itself freely to the Spirit's guidance. The Fourth Evangelist perceives, even more clearly, the danger of mere fixity. The Spirit, working through the church, preserves the truth but at the same time renews it; and these two activities are necessary to each other.

In one respect John has failed to do justice to his own thought. While he speaks of a new revelation given by the Spirit, he tends to confuse it with a mere doctrinal theory. He assumes that the message itself has somehow been enlarged and deepened when it is brought into the light of the new Logos conception. In all times the church

¹⁶ Jude 3.

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has made too much of the mere intellectual expression of its faith. This has been regarded as the surest index of a divine power which is constantly making for fuller revelation. In our own age, for example, it is taken for granted that our religion has more to offer when it is re-stated in terms of modern science. Or we seek to reconcile the demands of Jesus with the new social philosophies, and believe that in this way they are enhanced in value. It is supposed that by relating itself to man's growing knowledge, religion itself advances. We see here the revealing work of the Spirit.

Knowledge, however, is not to be confused with revelation. That which changes and widens with fuller knowledge is not the light, but only the field of vision which it illuminates. A man will sometimes spend his whole lifetime in applying, on an ever larger scale, a truth which came to him in childhood. His later conception of it is certainly far broader than his early one, but it does not thereby become more of a revelation. On the contrary, he is bitterly aware that it is less so. It has lost the glow and reality, and he would willingly give all his knowledge if he could only see again what he saw at first. This is no less true in the history of religion. It cannot be questioned that since the time of Christ our thought and experience and range of action have increased enormously, but this does not mean a growth of revelation. Nothing has happened except that the truth once known on the small scale can now be discerned on the large one. When Archimedes discovered his famous proposition he drew his diagram with his finger in the sand.

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It might now be drawn, in luminous electric lines, over the whole face of the sky; but the principle it demonstrates would be just the same. The size and impressiveness of the diagram would neither disprove the principle nor make it more significant. For that part, something was given in the first rude diagram which can never be given again. It represented a new truth, breaking in upon the mind of man.

In itself, therefore, revelation has nothing to do with larger knowledge and capacity. The Psalmist had no measure of the stellar distances and magnitudes, but he was conscious, no less than the modern astronomer, that the heavens declare the glory of God. His vision of the divine presence was possibly more intense than ours, though he saw only golden lamps instead of worlds. Jesus imparted his teaching to handfuls of Galilean villagers, and we have now to apply it to nations and empires. Yet the truth he taught is unaltered, and the revelation consists in that truth, on whatever scale it may be put into action. There is indeed a danger, as Paul perceived, that by extended knowledge men may not obtain new revelation but may lose that which they have. By their wisdom they grow blind to the truth itself and are engrossed in issues which at most are secondary. Science may result in nothing but calculations of weight and measure; enquiries into the moral law may lead only to some new system of diet or economics. Nothing is more barren than knowledge unless it goes hand in hand with the sense of God revealing himself.

It may indeed be doubted whether the widening of

knowledge has much to give to religion. We meet constantly with quite illiterate people whose perception of God is finer and deeper than that of very learned men; and this is equally true of bygone generations which by our standards were ignorant. No one can deny that we understand the world much better than the men who wrote the Latin hymns and built the cathedrals. It is natural to believe that their religion, like their knowledge, was childish, and this is commonly in our minds when we speak of "mediæval piety." So we look forward to a time when our knowledge, in its turn, will be far outdistanced, and take for granted that men will then have a religion higher and more satisfying than anything we can yet imagine. There are many who would seem to be fascinated by the very phrase "the religion of the future." But all this is pure illusion. Religion is the same under all conditions of knowledge. The experience of the ancient saint is repeated in the saint today, and will likewise repeat itself a thousand years hence. It is indeed necessary to reinterpret religion in the light of ampler knowledge. The faith reflected in the old creeds must be expressed in new words, with the aid of new philosophies, before it can be accepted by men today. But this is not because we have outgrown the faith, in virtue of our knowledge. It is simply because the forms of thought in which the faith was conveyed have ceased to be real, and must be brought into correspondence with our actual thinking. Our very object in changing the forms is to keep the faith the same. Unless it is replanted in the new knowledge it cannot be vital for us as it was for our

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fathers. Everything depends on the living quality which is present in our faith.

It is from this point of view that the growth of knowledge becomes a real factor in revelation. There is no truth or experience which is not dully accepted after a lapse of time as a matter of course; but as it comes to us under aspects which are entirely new our eyes are opened again to the strangeness of it. We are made conscious, as we were at first, that it is from God. Nature with all its miracles becomes familiar; but with each new disclosure of chemistry or astronomy we grow alive once more to the mystery. The moral demands come to be taken for granted, and are petrified in codes and conventions; but every advance towards a higher form of society revives our insight into their inner meaning. Increase of knowledge does not bring new revelation, but it ensures that what was once revelation should continue to be so. As it comes with a new voice and addresses itself to ever changing conditions, the divine message preserves that attribute by which we know it to be divine.

This is understood by the New Testament writers, and especially by Paul and John. The gospel as they know it is a revelation, and in this they find the secret of its irresistible power. It requires no proving, for it carries with it the witness of the Spirit. Men are compelled to feel when it comes to them that God has spoken. But how is it to possess always this divine immediacy? Signs are already evident in those early days that faith was hardening into custom. The love of many had

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grown cold.¹⁷ Those who were once enlightened and had tasted of the heavenly gift, had become heedless, and were drifting away.¹⁸ How was the gospel to come always, as it had done at first, with the power of a revelation? In every age this has been the real problem of Christianity, and the aim of the New Testament writers is to answer it. They declare that while the truth was imparted once for all it is given continually, in forms which are ever changing. Christ is still speaking to his people. He throws a present light on every difficulty. He makes himself known in each new event and in every enlargement of human thought. His truth is always coming as a revelation.

Only as we grasp this New Testament conception can we understand the true nature of our religion. In the course of two thousand years it has presented itself under many different aspects, and each of them has claimed to be the essential one. It has appeared as a higher philosophy, as a ritual and sacramental system, as an ethical or social activity, as a mystical way. These interpretations are all valid, but the substance of the religion is not to be found in any of them, or in all of them taken together. It consists in a living apprehension of God. All the modes of worship and thought and action have this for their purpose, and when they fail to awaken the sense of God they have grown empty, and must be exchanged for others. For Christianity was given as a revelation, and has meaning and power only when we can so receive it, with the knowledge of its newness and wonder. Christ

¹⁷ Matt. 24:12.

¹⁸ Heb. 6:4; 2:1.

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appeared to men for a little time in a distant past, and they were aware, in his presence, that a barrier had been thrown down, that they had entered into fellowship with the divine. How can this sense of God which was given for a moment be made continual—a well of water springing up into everlasting life? This is the grand question of our religion, and for the answer to it we still go back to the New Testament.

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